TOP-RATED SUNSCREENS | SAVE BIG ON CAR RENTALS P. 56 | NEW GUIDE TO TIPPING

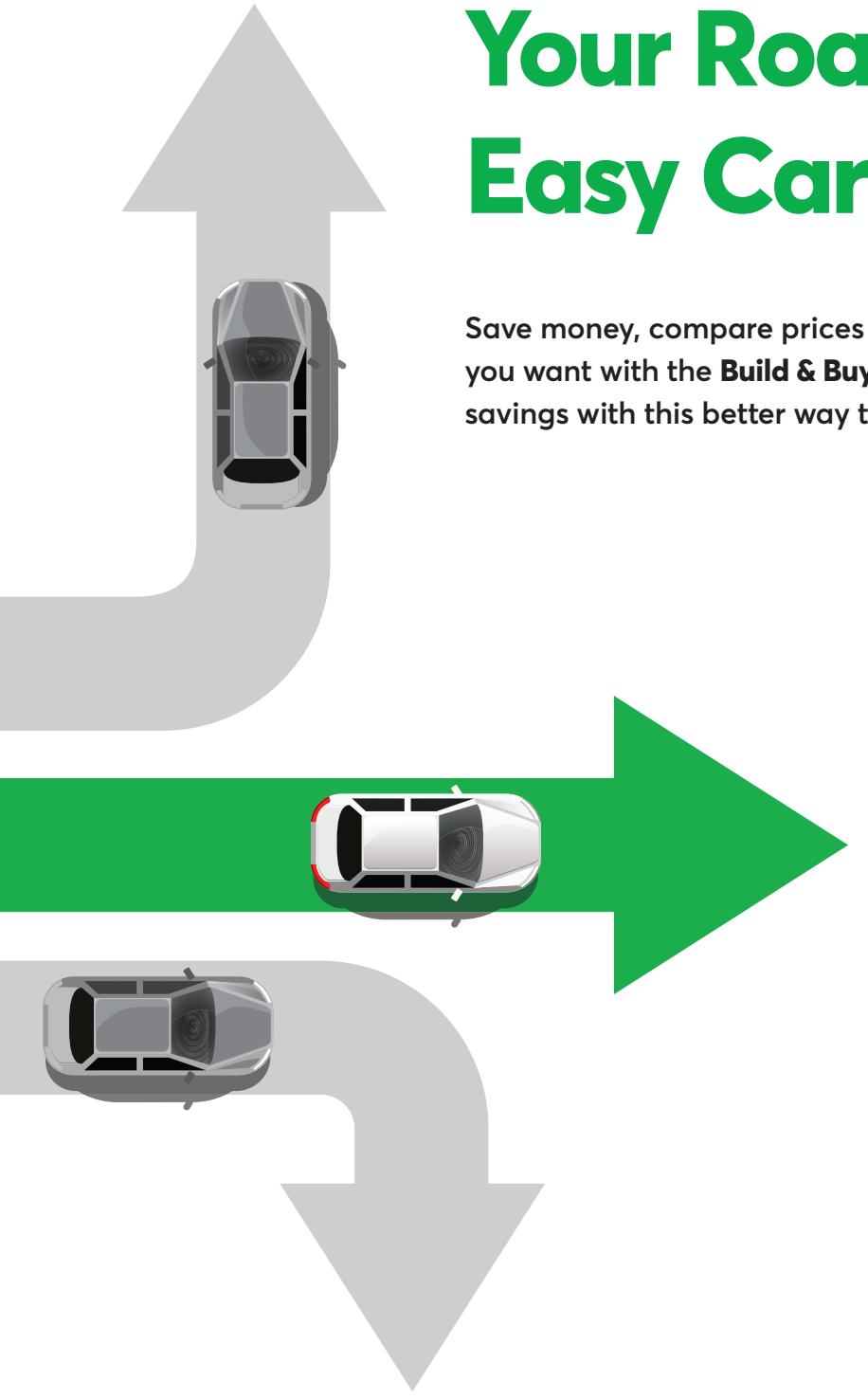
CR Consumer Reports®

JULY 2024

RATINGS & REVIEWS
- Smartphones
- Tires
- Refrigerators
- Headphones
- Blenders
- Insect Repellents

Cable TV or Streaming?

Your Road Map to Easy Car Shopping



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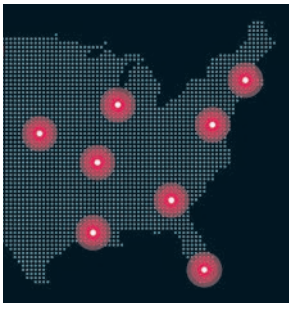

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PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (LEXUS)

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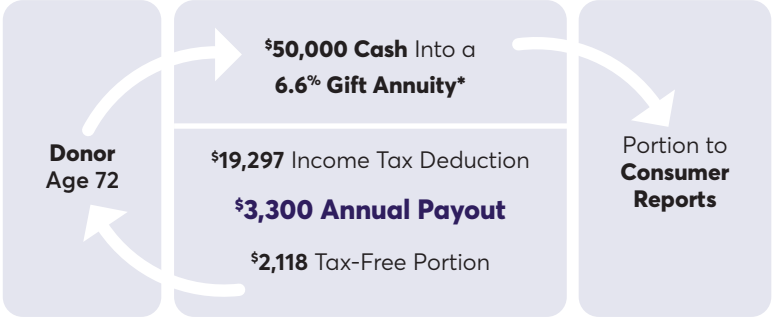

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Have a Safer Summer

SUMMER IS HERE, and if you're like me, you can't wait to enjoy the great outdoors. But like any season, there are a few things to keep in mind, and CR has the trusted information you need to plan ahead.

When I was growing up, summer meant pulling out the window fans and elbowing my siblings for positioning. Those days bear no resemblance to recent record-breaking heat waves. (Phoenix suffered through 31 straight days with temperatures of 110° F or higher last summer.) This year, it's important to prepare for potentially extreme temperatures. And whether you're relaxing at home, going for your daily walk, or heading out for a drive, we share the practical guidance you need to ready yourself.

Summer also means sun, of course, and it is vital that we all protect ourselves with sunscreen while we bask in its glow. Just remember that not all sunscreens are created equal, which is why CR rigorously tests dozens of them every year. We recommend a number of highly effective products, starting on page 18.

Food safety is also important as you plan that Fourth of July picnic. CR has a list of the staples linked to the most serious bacteria-related food recalls and outbreaks in 2023. Some are the usual suspects, such as leafy greens and raw cookie dough, but cantaloupe, alfalfa sprouts, and peaches can be problematic as well. Sign up for real-time alerts on the latest food recalls at **CR.org/foodrecalltracker**.

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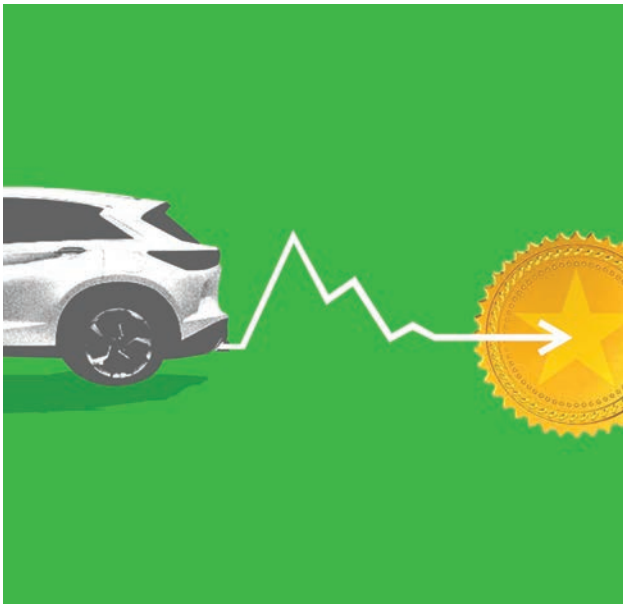

Reducing Auto Pollution

In March, the Environmental Protection Agency set new standards that will reduce emissions and pollution from new cars, SUVs, and pickup trucks.

In addition to limiting the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change, the regulations will keep thousands of tons of pollutants out of the air we breathe, which will confer enormous public health benefits, especially in communities near major roadways.

The rules are also expected to yield economic benefits as consumers take advantage of the fuel savings and the lower repair and maintenance costs of less-polluting vehicles. CR's analysis projects that the standards (to be introduced in autos beginning in 2027) will save consumers around $1 trillion over the next 20 years.

In the year leading up to the announcement, CR provided the EPA with input on the proposal, testified at public hearings, and collected more than 18,000 petition signatures in support of strong emissions regulations.

Both the EPA and CR advocates have emphasized that the rules are "technology neutral"—meaning automakers can meet the requirements by selling cleaner gas-powered models, as well as conventional and plug-in hybrids and fully electric vehicles.

$6,000

Amount the EPA says the new standards will save in reduced fuel and maintenance costs over the lifetime of your vehicle.

CR's auto ratings (at **CR.org/cars**) can steer you to the best new and used vehicles. And we have a buying guide to help sort out the pros and cons of hybrids, plug-in hybrids, and EVs, at **CR.org/evguide**.

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

ACTION UPDATE

Federal law says credit card late fees must be reasonable and in proportion to the amount issuers spend handling late payments. But the fees have grown far larger than the costs to card companies. CR has long urged the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to take action, and in March the bureau finalized rules that would cut the typical late fee from more than $30 to $8, saving consumers a projected $10 billion a year. A federal district court in Texas stopped the rule from taking effect in May, but CR advocates hope it will survive legal challenges.

Video Doorbell News

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Video doorbells are supposed to help homeowners feel safer by letting them monitor their doors via a smartphone app. But CR found that some of these devices can have technical flaws that allow them to be easily hijacked by unauthorized parties–thieves and stalkers, for example–who could use them to track family members as they come and go.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

These security gaps came to light during our routine tests on video doorbells. Further investigation found seemingly identical doorbells under at least 10 brand names, including Fishbot, Rakeblue, and Tuck, being sold online by Amazon, Sears, Temu, and Walmart. The problem devices were controlled through the same mobile app, called Aiwit, and manufactured by the Chinese company Eken Group. The video doorbell apps were also exposing IP addresses and other types of user information to the internet without encryption, making them highly vulnerable to online criminals.

We shared our findings with the manufacturer (which has since fixed the security breaches) and the Federal Communications Commission, which wrote the retailers asking how they make sure the products they sell conform to regulations. We're now urging online retailers to do more to ensure the quality of products sold on their platforms, and pushing legislators to make online platforms liable if they sell defective products.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For the latest updates on our doorbell investigation, go to **CR.org/doorbellsecurity**. And you can check out our full video doorbell ratings at **CR.org/videobells**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

Our April 2024 issue article **"The Hot Hybrid Everyone's Talking About"** gave CR's expert advice on whether you should buy a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV). Our readers shared their thoughts and questions. To add yours, head to **CR.org/phev**.

I ENJOYED THE ARTICLE about PHEVs. It is my understanding that one of the benefits of EVs is the reduced maintenance cost because of the lack of an internal combustion engine. What is the expected cost of ownership of a PHEV compared with an EV or a gas-only car?
–Tod Christie, Park Ridge, NJ

EDITOR'S NOTE *Unlike EVs–which never require oil changes, spark plugs, or timing chain replacements–regular hybrids and PHEVs have engines that require routine maintenance. So the main way you save money with these hybrids is on fewer fill-ups of gas. Our reliability surveys also show that regular hybrid models, which have been around for 25 years, require fewer repairs than PHEVs or the latest EVs. Our analysts expect that reliability for PHEVs and EVs will gradually increase as manufacturers improve their powertrains and charging systems. That prediction–plus the fuel savings–indicate to CR's auto pros that PHEVs will be less expensive to own than gas-only cars for most drivers.*

I BELIEVE that the way CR presents mileage for PHEVs distorts the reality. Your high praise for the RAV4 Prime is well deserved: Mine is easily among the best cars I've ever owned. Your reporting that it gets 34 mpg, though, is misleading if mpg represents the miles a driver should expect to get from a gallon of gas. Given the Prime's long EV range, a person driving it mostly around town–and relying mostly on electricity–can expect to get more than twice that mpg. I zero my trip meter when I fill the gas tank, then check it the next time I refuel. I'm realizing a bit north of 92 mpg. There may be some incremental electricity expense, but I haven't seen a blip worth caring about. Reporting mpg as if an owner never uses the EV capability under-represents the real-world gas efficiency PHEVs deliver.
–Thomas Walker, Salt Lake City, UT

EDITOR'S NOTE *Your situation represents a best-case scenario. The more you plug in, the higher your effective fuel economy will be. But there's plenty of research that shows some PHEV owners never plug in. In an attempt to be as transparent as possible, we report two aspects for PHEVs: mpg when operated as a hybrid and range when using just electric power. We think this approach empowers consumers to decide if a particular PHEV fits their driving routine.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

EV RANGE CONCERNS

IN THE "BEST & WORST LISTS" in the April issue, you are doing a disservice to your readers by focusing on EVs with the longest range without sufficient discussion. Every carmaker could dramatically increase range by increasing battery size, but the added weight needs to be balanced against strong downsides (economy, handling, braking, acceleration, safety, cost, etc.). Most owners will charge at home and should not be encouraged to buy an extra 1,000 pounds of mostly unneeded battery weight "just in case."
–Clifford Leong, Coronado, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *We spotlight EV range because it continues to stand out as a top concern for consumers, based on our surveys. Yes, there are diminishing returns with battery size. A bigger battery requires everything to be fortified to manage the weight, from brakes*

to vehicle structure. For most drivers, a range of more than 250 miles would be plenty for multiple days of commuting or a weekend road trip. And it would provide a margin to cover reduced range due to cold weather and battery age. Ranges over 300 miles are becoming more common. Adding that to the growing comfort with EVs should reduce range worries, based on our surveys and analysis.

REPLACING A MATTRESS

I APPRECIATED your March 2004 cover story, "How to Find a Mattress You'll Love." But you didn't cover how to know if you need to buy a new mattress. I'm interested because our mattress is more than 30 years old but doesn't have any lumps and we still sleep well on it. My husband and I are between 140 and 160 pounds and we flip the mattress around once a year. It doesn't seem worn out. Should we be thinking of getting a new [mattress] anyway?
–Anna Browne, Portland, OR

EDITOR'S NOTE *If your mattress is still in good shape and you feel well rested when you wake up in the morning, then there's no need to replace it. While mattresses generally last seven to 10 years, they can last longer depending on the quality of the materials in it and how well you maintain it. You seem to have taken good care of yours by rotating the mattress on a regular basis. (We actually recommend rotating it every six months unless the manufacturer instructs otherwise.) But if you've ever felt more refreshed and less achy after waking up in a different bed–like one in a hotel–then it may be worth heading to a store to try some newer models.*

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HEALTHY DRINK PICKS

THE MARCH ARTICLE "Are These 'Healthy' Drinks Good for You?" didn't include an obvious option: V8 Juice. I often imbibe several of the drinks you reviewed, but my go-to favorite is V8. It's full of vitamin C, vitamin A, iron, and potassium. Is V8 too old-fashioned or is there another reason it didn't make the list?
–Peter Alan Thelin, El Cerrito, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *For that article, we reviewed some newer drinks that are claimed to boost energy, mood, and more. V8 isn't marketed with those claims, but it's a healthy choice. As the name suggests, it's a blend of eight vegetable juices and provides decent amounts of vitamins A and C and potassium. It's also low in calories–45 in an 8-ounce serving–and doesn't have added sugars. Its sodium content can be problematic, though. A serving of Original V8 100% Vegetable Juice has 640 mg of sodium, 28 percent of the 2,300 mg daily value limit. The low-sodium version, with just 140 mg per serving, is a better option.*

CLEANER TOASTER OVENS

"The Best New Toaster Ovens From Our Tests" in the March issue should have noted whether the oven has a slide-out crumb tray or a hinged oven floor. I won't use a model with the latter; you have to use two hands to lift the oven and then a third hand to open the door and brush out the crumbs. Since I have failed to grow that third hand, I need to know: Does a high ease-of-cleaning score mean it has a slide-out crumb tray?
—Karen Preston, Rensselaer, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE *There's good news here: A CR market analyst says that slide-out trays are now standard in most new toaster ovens. In our ease-of-cleaning test, we look for an accessible crumb tray that moves smoothly. We also check for areas that might trap food debris. Many models now have a nonstick interior.*

PLASTICS IN APPLIANCES

BRAVO FOR ADVOCATING to reduce plastics in our foods. But in the March issue, the coffee makers you included in "Coffee Makers With Big Benefits" seem to have an abundance of plastic components, which come into contact with hot beverages–and at some point will end up in a landfill. How is that part of the plan to eliminate plastic?
–Sioux Rogers, Applegate, OR

EDITOR'S NOTE *You make an excellent point. While research on the health issues resulting from exposure to plastic materials is still developing, CR has recommended not storing or heating food (or anything you're going to ingest) in plastic. Coffee makers almost always have some plastic parts, and they're often elements that come into contact with hot liquid, like the filter basket where the coffee brews. Companies may be reluctant to shift to other materials because it makes the appliances more expensive to produce. But we do hope that's where coffee makers and other appliances are headed. Until then, you can make coffee in a French press made entirely of metal and glass or use a ceramic pour-over coffee cone.*

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Blenders

WE TESTED: 64 full-sized models
WE TEST FOR: How well a blender makes icy drinks and smoothies, crushes ice, purées vegetables for soup, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 31-88

SUPER SMOOTHIES & HIGH OWNER SATISFACTION

✔ **Breville The Q BBL820SHY1BUS1**
$400

79 OVERALL SCORE

COMES WITH A PERSONAL-SIZED BLENDER ATTACHMENT

Ninja Twisti High Speed Duo SS151
$140

74 OVERALL SCORE

MAKES EXCELLENT SMOOTHIES FOR LESS

Oster 2143023
$80

72 OVERALL SCORE

Carry-On Luggage

WE TESTED: 7 models
WE TEST FOR: How easy the bag is to carry and wheel around; how well it resists damage; the quality of its seams, straps, and zippers; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 61-80

DURABLE EXTERIOR & LIFETIME WARRANTY

Monos Carry-On 7.4 lb.
$255

70 OVERALL SCORE

HIGH-QUALITY CONSTRUCTION & VERY LIGHTWEIGHT

American Tourister Wavebreaker 20" Spinner 5.7 lb.
$120

68 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE, EXPANDABLE INTERIOR

Calpak Trnk Carry-On 7.1 lb.
$195

61 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Will packing cubes help me save space in my suitcase?

IT DEPENDS ON the type of packing cubes you buy. Some sets are just organizers: They contain different-sized pouches to separate your underwear from your shirts, for example. But some packing cubes help you save space by compressing your clothing, either by having you roll them up to push air out of the bag, or by using compression zippers to squash the bag down. (Skip compression travel bags that require the use of a vacuum because you might not have one available to you when you're traveling.) Packing cubes—whether they compress or not—can weigh a lot more than you might expect: Certain sets we've tried add over 1.5 pounds to your bag.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE — BETTER | ✔ CR RECOMMENDED

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Insect Repellents

WE TESTED: 53 models
WE TEST FOR: How effectively a product protects against mosquitoes and whether it stains or damages clothing.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 55
Range: 4-96

SUPERB PROTECTION
Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes
$5 (12-pack)

96 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE SPRAY
Off Sportsmen Deep Woods Insect Repellent 3
$7.50 (6 oz.)

93 OVERALL SCORE

DEET-FREE & LESS LIKELY TO STAIN CLOTHING
Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent2 Pump
$5 (4 oz.)

90 OVERALL SCORE

All-Season SUV Tires

WE TESTED: 15 tires
WE TEST FOR: How well a tire brakes in wet and dry conditions, how long its tread lasts, how smooth and quiet the ride it provides is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 61
Range: 54-78

COMFY RIDE & LONG TREAD LIFE
Michelin CrossClimate2
$260

78 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT PERFORMANCE FOR LESS
Vredestein HiTrac
$207

72 OVERALL SCORE

LOW ROLLING RESISTANCE FOR BETTER FUEL EFFICIENCY
Pirelli Scorpion AS Plus 3
$229

70 OVERALL SCORE

Noise-Canceling Headphones Under $100

WE TESTED: 37 wireless models
WE TEST FOR: Sound quality, including clarity and tonal accuracy, and how well the headphones reduce ambient noise when active noise cancellation is turned on.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 42-75

TOP PICK FOR OVER-EAR HEADPHONES
Soundcore Life Q20
$60

75 OVERALL SCORE

BUDS WITH LONG BATTERY LIFE
Soundcore Space A40
$60

75 OVERALL SCORE

EXCELLENT NOISE CANCELLATION FOR LESS
1More PistonBuds Pro True Wireless ANC
$50

63 OVERALL SCORE

Top-Freezer Refrigerators

WE TESTED: 13 models, all 29 to 30 inches wide
WE TEST FOR: Uniformity of temperature throughout the fridge, how energy-efficient and quiet it is, how spacious the interior is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 62
Range: 53-84

UNIFORM TEMPERATURE & VERY QUIET
Samsung RT18M6215SG
$1,150

84 OVERALL SCORE

SPILLPROOF SHELVES
LG LTCS20030S
$795

78 OVERALL SCORE

LOW-COST & ENERGY-EFFICIENT
Frigidaire FFTR1835VW
$600

65 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Portable Grills & More

The tread on my tires looks more worn down in some areas than others. Is that typical?

TIRES THAT ARE properly maintained should be evenly worn across the entire tread. If you're seeing worn sections, a common reason could be that the tires haven't been properly inflated.

If the tread is more worn down in the center of the tires, it's likely that you've been driving on overinflated tires. If it's worn down on both of the outer edges of the tires, it could signal that they're underinflated. Both problems can be solved by checking the air pressure of your tires when they're cold (before they've been driven more than a few miles). Inflate them to the number listed on the doorjamb, in the glove compartment, or on the fuel door. Repeat once a month.

There are other reasons for unevenly worn tires, though. If the tread is worn on just one side of the tires, it could be that the suspension isn't aligned properly, which can cause your car to pull to one side while you're driving. A tire tread worn down on just one edge could also indicate that parts of your car's suspension are worn, which can cause a bouncier ride, handling problems, and more. Have a mechanic check for these issues as soon as possible.

Even if only one area of your tire has been worn down too far, it's best to replace the tire. Here's how to tell: If you put a penny in the tread groove and you see the top of Abraham Lincoln's head, the tread is too low. Before you shop, consult our tire ratings at **CR.org/tires**. You can also find our top all-season SUV tires on page 9.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

How can I get rid of toenail fungus?

IF ONE OR MORE of your toenails are discolored, thick, and/or cracked, you may have a fungal infection. The fungus itself isn't dangerous, says Hillary Brenner, DPM, a podiatrist in New York City and New Jersey. But this kind of infection is often unsightly and uncomfortable when you have shoes on, and may spread to your other nails.

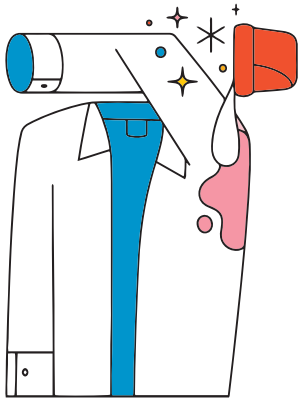
Fungal infections can be difficult to treat. Your best bet is to see either a dermatologist or a podiatrist. They may be able to prescribe an oral anti-fungal medication, such as terbinafine (Lamisil), to treat the fungus. But prescription oral anti-fungal medications aren't always recommended for older adults because they can cause liver damage. There are also over-the-counter topical products available—which can contain anti-fungal agents like tolnaftate—but these might not be effective for everyone.

To keep an infection from getting worse or spreading, make sure the affected nails are kept clean, and trim them frequently. Use a nail file to thin the nails if they have thickened. A daily application of a moisturizer with urea can thin nails, too. If your nails are proving tough to trim, take a bath or shower first, which will help soften them. To prevent nail fungal infections—as well as fungal infections that occur on the skin of your feet, like athlete's foot—don't go barefoot around pools or in locker rooms. And after a bath or swim, dry your feet well.

What's the best way to get sweat stains out of white clothing?

PUT DOWN THE BLEACH! Using it on sweat stains can actually make your whites look worse. This may be especially noticeable if you use bleach to treat underarm stains, which are typically already tinted yellow from a mix of your sweat and/or antiperspirant or deodorant. When chlorine bleach reacts with those sweat stains it can further yellow or darken them. Here's the better way to whiten sweat stains: Apply a liquid detergent or stain removal spray directly on the spot and let it sit for 5 minutes. (In our tests, the best detergents for removing body oils are Persil ProClean Stain Fighter and Tide Ultra Stain Release. And OxiClean Max Force Spray is a good stain remover.) Then, wash the garment on a warm water cycle.

If the stain is still there after washing, don't put the clothing in the dryer. The heat will set the stain, says CR's laundry expert, Richard Handel. Instead, reapply the detergent, let it sit, and wash the item again.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

IN THE KNOW

The Best Paper Towels

When you need to quickly clean up a mess, few things beat the convenience of a paper towel. But some rolls cost more than $4 each—and they're not recyclable either. So when you tear off a sheet, you want it to get the job done. We tested six popular brands, including big names like Bounty and Brawny, to find out which ones are strong enough to handle wet and dirty challenges without falling apart. We also looked at whether a brand's paper towel could be used a second time, and how easy it was to tear a sheet off the roll.

Bounty paper towels, which were the most expensive we purchased, earned the highest score in our test for water absorbency. They also had impressive scrubbing strength, consistently handling tough spills, and were able to be reused to clean a second spill. We found two other less-pricey brands that also performed well—and one that didn't pass our mess tests.

TOP PICK

Bounty Select-A-Size Sheets 4¢ per sheet

Bounty sheets, the best in our tests, were the most absorbent towels: They took up 49 grams of water, on average, per square foot of paper towel.

A STRONG CHOICE

Brawny Tear-A-Square 2¢ per sheet

Brawny absorbed an average of 46 grams of water, just 3 grams less than Bounty—for half the price.

THIRD PLACE

Presto (Amazon) Flex-A-Size 2¢ per sheet

Presto sheets were a good low-cost pick. They absorbed 45 grams of water and held up in our scrub tests.

ONE TO SKIP

Sparkle Pick-A-Size 2¢ per sheet

These absorbed the least water in our test—an average of just 25 grams. They didn't clean up messes well and fell apart quickly in our scrub test.

PHOTO, TOP: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (PAPER TOWELS)

For our full reviews of all six paper towel brands, go to ***CR.org/papertowels****.*

SAVVY SHOPPER

For Better Grilling, Try These

Want to make your backyard grilling this summer even easier? The right accessories can help you cook meat perfectly, flip food safely, clean up faster, and serve up more than just your average burgers and hot dogs (think chicken kebabs, ribs, pork shoulder, and more). After trying out dozens of popular tools, CR's grilling expert and trained chef, Paul Hope, reveals his favorites.

Jolly Green Ekogrips BBQ Gloves $29

These silicone gloves make it a breeze to lift an entire hot brisket or pork shoulder—both of which are far too big to tackle with tongs. They have excellent grip, are heat-resistant to over 400° F, and are dishwasher-safe.

Grand Grill Daddy Steam Cleaning Grill Brush $100

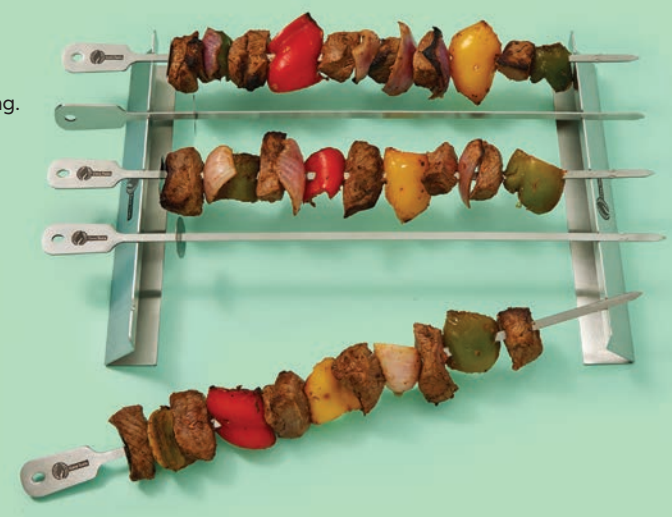
"This brush is tough on stuck-on gunk and cuts cleaning time way down," Hope says. Plus, it has a water reservoir so that when you use it on warm grates, it essentially steam cleans them, loosening burnt-on residue without you needing to apply much force.

Cave Tools Kabob Rack $10

This raised rack keeps kebabs just above the cooking grates on your grill to prevent foods from scorching. This is particularly helpful for chicken, which needs to be left on the grill for long stretches in order to cook through to a safe internal temperature (at least 165° F).

Cave Tools BBQ Kabob Skewers $25

Looking for a good set of skewers? Hope suggests using these flat skewers because, unlike traditional round skewers, they keep tender foods like scallops from spinning around when you're flipping them.



M Kitchen World Silicone Basting Brush Set $8

These budget-friendly tools can really elevate your grilling game. "I use silicone basting brushes to slather sauce onto ribs and chicken, so I don't miss any spots," Hope says. "And I like that these can be tossed into the dishwasher when I'm done."

PHOTOS: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (SKEWERS); EVERETT COLLECTION INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (FELIX THE CAT); WEEGEE (ARTHUR FELLIG)/INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES (ARTHUR GODFREY); MANUFACTURERS (3); CONSUMER REPORTS (3)

CR Time Traveler TV PROGRAMMING

1931 The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) begins TV broadcasts from the top of the Empire State Building. What did it show? A Felix the Cat doll on top of a phonograph turntable.

1948 "Don't expect to turn on your television set and get a program as you can with radio," we warn readers. Most stations air programs for only a few hours each day.

1951 Color broadcasts begin on CBS. The network plans to broadcast 20 hours per week in color, including popular shows like "Arthur Godfrey and His Friends."

1962 New "large screens" (like this 23-inch set) display "the perfectly rectangular TV picture sent out by the transmitter," we report.

1972 TVs in some cities are plagued by "ghosts"—a term for multiple overlapping images due to poor reception. The fix? Roof antennas, like this top-rated VHF model ($29).

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

Meater Plus With Bluetooth Repeater $80

89 OVERALL SCORE

This accurate thermometer also has exceptional alarm settings, Hope says. The wireless probe will ping your phone when the meat is done, and alert you if the grill temperature drops too low—an extra-handy feature when using charcoal grills so that you know when to add coals.

Paul Hope
CR's grilling expert and trained chef

ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: JONNY WHITE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (NETFLIX); MANUFACTURERS (2); CONSUMER REPORTS (4)

CR SMART SOLUTION

Ant-Proof Your Home

If you've ever had a conga line of ants on your kitchen counter, you know that getting rid of them can be a challenge. We spoke with CR's experts, as well as extermination pros, about the most effective ways to get rid of ants in your home.

ANT PREVENTION

› **Seal up crevices.** Caulk gaps around doors and windows. Replacing old weather stripping can help, too.

› **Trim back nearby shrubbery so that it doesn't touch your house.** Ants use branches that abut the outside of your house as a highway into your home.

› **Store firewood away from the house.** Carpenter ants, found throughout the U.S., like to nest in tree stumps and firewood.

› **Control those crumbs.** Wipe up crumbs and spills immediately, and always rinse containers before putting them in recycling bins–a hot spot for ants. Ants are also attracted to kibble residue in pet dishes.

ANT REMOVAL

› **Use soapy water.** To get rid of ants visible to you right now, use soapy water and a paper towel to wipe them up.

› **Set bait traps.** Entomologist and Terminix market technical director Chad Gore tells CR that ant bait traps or "stations" are widely successful for controlling most types of ants (you can find a 10-pack for $10). Ant "workers" bring the bait back and feed it to the rest of the colony, which leads to its collapse. "It can take a few days or more to see results," Gore says, "but playing the long game is well worth the wait."

› **Store pantry foods in sealed containers.** We suggest the Rubbermaid set below, which aced our tests for durability, seal quality, and ease of use. It's also a good idea to keep ripe fruits in the fridge.

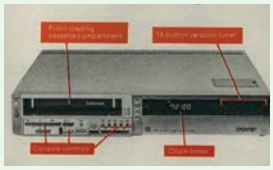
› **Don't bother with pesticide spray or sticky traps.** These sprays are ineffective, and can contain ingredients that are harmful to your health and the environment, says CR's senior scientist Michael Hansen. Sprays will kill the worker ants, but they won't kill the queen, her colony, or her eggs (which is the root of the problem). Similarly, sticky traps catch worker ants but won't kill the colony.

› **Bring in the pros when all else fails.** If the tips here aren't helping alleviate your ant problem, it's probably time to call in a pest expert.

93 OVERALL SCORE

Rubbermaid Brilliance 18pc Glass Food Storage Container Set $80

1983 VCRs—which can receive TV signals whether your set is on or not—let you record programs and watch them later, CR explains. In our tests, a Mitsubishi is tops.



1991 We ask CR readers to rate the quality of cable channels and find that the Discovery Channel and CNN are two of the highest-rated.

2007 Netflix, previously known for DVD rentals, launches its online streaming service. By 2017, 28 percent of U.S. adults are watching TV mostly via streaming, not cable.

2013 Sports channels may drive up your monthly cable bill, we report. ESPN alone costs about $5. And regional sports networks can add $2 to $3.

2024 In our latest ratings of streaming media devices, which add apps to your TV, this Amazon device is among the very best.

Amazon Fire TV Cube (3rd Gen) $140

75 OVERALL SCORE

For our latest report on cable and streaming services, turn to page 24.

FOOD IQ™

Our Favorite Supermarket Ice Creams

Store-brand ice creams—those that carry a supermarket's name—may be only half the price of ice creams from companies like Breyers and Häagen-Dazs. But is that lower-priced tub just as good as those more famous brands—from both a taste and an ingredient perspective?

To find out, our experts blind-tasted seven store-brand vanilla ice creams as well as two famous brand-name ones: Breyers and Häagen-Dazs. Some of the ice creams we tested are billed as "premium," like the Häagen-Dazs, Aldi, and Trader Joe's products shown here. This means they usually contain less air and have a richer, denser texture (along with more calories, added sugars, and saturated fat) than regular ice creams, like Breyers.

What we found: All of the supermarket vanilla ice creams tasted great and were less expensive than the big name brands. What's more, the supermarket brands we liked also had fewer additives—much like the pricier ice creams we tried. Check out our top choices, at right. (Nutrition information listed on this page is per serving: ⅔ cup.)

REGULAR ICE CREAM

Breyers Ice Cream Natural Vanilla
1.5 quarts, $5.50

CALORIES **170** | SATURATED FAT **6 g**
ADDED SUGARS **14 g** | PROTEIN **3 g**

The flavors of milk and cream dominate, but you can certainly taste the vanilla. The texture is a bit icy. Breyers contains few additives.

WELLSLEY FARMS
PREMIUM VANILLA FLAVORED ICE CREAM
PREMIUM ICE CREAM CRAFTED WITH 100% GRADE A MILK & CREAM
NO ARTIFICIAL GROWTH HORMONES (rBST*), COLORS OR FLAVORS
ONE HALF GALLON (64 FL OZ) 1.89 L
42¢ PER SERVING

PREMIUM ICE CREAM

Häagen-Dazs Ice Cream Vanilla
½ gallon, $16

CALORIES **320** | SATURATED FAT **13 g**
ADDED SUGARS **18 g** | PROTEIN **6 g**

This premium pick has a fresh cream and vanilla flavor, with a smooth texture. And there are no additives.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

OUR TOP STORE-BRAND PICK

Wellsley Farms (BJ's) Premium Ice Cream, Vanilla
½ gallon, $5

CALORIES **170** | SATURATED FAT **6 g**
ADDED SUGARS **14 g** | PROTEIN **3 g**

Despite the word "premium" on the label, this is a regular ice cream. It has an airy texture—even more so than the Breyers—and a good balance of dairy and vanilla flavors. It also has few additives.

BIGGEST SAVINGS

Great Value (Walmart) Ice Cream Vanilla Bean
1.5 quarts, $2.70

CALORIES **180** | SATURATED FAT **6 g**
ADDED SUGARS **13 g** | PROTEIN **3 g**

This ice cream is creamy and smooth, with a firmer texture and stronger vanilla flavor than the Breyers. But it also contains more additives, like vegetable gums.

OUR TOP STORE-BRAND PICK

Specially Selected (Aldi) Super Premium Ice Cream Vanilla
1.5 quarts, $6

CALORIES **340** | SATURATED FAT **15 g**
ADDED SUGARS **23 g** | PROTEIN **6 g**

A tad sweeter than the Häagen-Dazs, with a bit of a caramel flavor. The ingredients list is the same as the Häagen-Dazs, and it contains no additives.

BIGGEST SAVINGS

Trader Joe's Super Premium Ice Cream French Vanilla
½ gallon, $6.50

CALORIES **330** | SATURATED FAT **12 g**
ADDED SUGARS **24 g** | PROTEIN **5 g**

This ice cream has a nice amount of vanilla bean flavor. It also has a slightly eggy vibe (while the brand-name Häagen-Dazs tastes more like fresh cream). It has several additives, like vegetable gums.

CR MONEY SAVER

Avoid Big Medical Bills When Traveling Abroad

Nearly 1 in 4 Americans have experienced a health problem when traveling internationally, according to a 2022 survey conducted by Harris Poll and GeoBlue, an international health insurance company. But most insurance providers, including Medicare, offer limited to no medical coverage outside the U.S., which means you could get stuck with a big bill if you need medical care while you travel. And even if your provider does cover you, insurance can still prove problematic. "If you're at a hospital in a foreign country, the time difference means you may not get help from your domestic health insurer when you need it, which could create a delay in receiving care or obtaining verification of your coverage," says Don Van Scyoc, GeoBlue's vice president of individual sales.

One solution: purchasing a travel medical insurance policy. This type of insurance—offered by providers such as Generali Global Assistance, International Medical Group, and GeoBlue—can cost less than $100 per trip and typically provides coverage for a range of emergencies, from broken bones to heart attacks, some of which may require evacuation by air transportation to the necessary healthcare facility.

Take these steps when considering a travel medical insurance plan.

› **Comparison shop.** The average policy costs $89, according to travel insurance comparison site Squaremouth, but exclusions, coverage limits, deductibles, and costs vary by policy and by provider, so get multiple quotes. Check websites like Squaremouth and InsureMyTrip, which make it easy to shop around. And keep in mind that some travel insurance plans that cover other problems like airplane delays and disruptions may also include medical coverage.

› **Look for a plan that covers medical evacuation in the event you need to be transported to receive care.** This is especially important if you are going to a place with limited or no access to major hospitals (such as a small island) and might need to be flown to a facility for treatment. Also check to see whether the plan covers "emergency repatriation," which will help you if you need to be evacuated back to the U.S. from a foreign country.

› **Research the provider.** Make sure the insurance carrier has a strong rating from the Better Business Bureau (go to bbb.org) and earns top marks from A.M. Best, a credit rating agency for insurance companies (go to ratings.ambest.com).

› **The plan should also cover any preexisting conditions you may have.** Verify that the preexisting condition coverage applies to both medical services and prescriptions, Van Scyoc says.

› **Get plenty of coverage.** Squaremouth recommends international travelers obtain a policy that provides at least $50,000 in emergency medical coverage and at least $100,000 in medical evacuation coverage. If you're going on a cruise or to a remote destination, consider bumping up your coverage to a minimum of $100,000 in emergency medical coverage and at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

TECH UPDATE

What to Do If Your Phone Gets Wet

A decade ago, your chances of saving a cell phone dropped in a pool–or a toilet–were slim. But today, most smartphones can withstand a splash, a spilled drink, or even a dunk in a pool if you follow the right steps to dry them out. Here's what to do.

LINT-FREE TOWEL

COTTON SWAB & RUBBING ALCOHOL

FAN

1 Turn off and/or unplug a wet phone immediately to reduce the risk of it short-circuiting.

2 If your phone came into contact with chlorinated pool water, salty ocean water, or soapy water, lightly rinse it with tap water. "Corrosive liquids like salt water can react badly with the metals in the phone," says CR's head of electronics testing, Rich Fisco.

3 Pat your device dry with a lint-free towel, focusing on areas like the headphone jack and charging port.

4 Gently tap your device with the charging port facing down.

5 Dip a cotton swab in rubbing alcohol and clean the charging port to remove any residue.

6 Instead of sticking your phone in rice (an old technique that can leave dust in the charging port), you should place your phone in front of a fan in a well-ventilated area for at least 24 hours before you try to turn it on again.

7 After a full day of drying time, turn your phone on to see whether it's functioning properly. It should be up and running as it would normally. If you still notice signs of water damage, like a glitching screen or distorted sounds, take your phone to a tech repair shop or contact the manufacturer.

Two phones that survived CR's dunk tank

CR conducts water-resistance testing on dozens of phones each year. We drizzle water on a device for 5 minutes, mimicking rain. We also submerge the device, then check whether it works when removed, and again after 24, 48, and 72 hours of air-drying. Two popular new phones, below, passed our tests with flying colors. To see how your own model fared, go to **CR.org/phones**.

Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra
$1,300
IP68-rated
87 OVERALL SCORE

Survived a dip in 1.5 meters (nearly 5 feet) of water for 30 minutes.

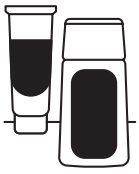
Apple iPhone 15 Pro Max
$1,200
IP68-rated
86 OVERALL SCORE

Survived a dip in 6 meters (nearly 20 feet) of water for 30 minutes.

PHOTO, TOP: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH. PHOTOS (PHONES): CONSUMER REPORTS; SAMSUNG. BOTTOM ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (BREYERS, HÄAGEN-DAZS)

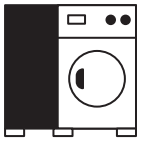
JULY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

SUNSCREEN



HOME SECURITY CAMERAS

CLOTHES DRYERS



BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

For more info, go to CR.org/buy.

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

KIA TELLURIDE

Kia is recalling 427,407 2020-2024 Telluride SUVs because they might roll away when put in Park. The problem is caused by an assembly error that may cause two important drivetrain components—the intermediate shaft and right front driveshaft—to not fully engage. If this happens, drivers may also notice grinding noises, vibration, or noise when hitting bumps or turning. They may also find it difficult to shift into Drive or Reverse.
What to do: Kia dealerships will perform a software update for the parking brake. If necessary, they will also replace the intermediate shaft. These fixes will be free of charge. Owners may contact Kia at 800-333-4542. The NHTSA campaign number is 24V214, and Kia's own number for this recall is SC303. To prevent any unintended vehicle movement before the software is updated, Kia advises owners to move the gear shifter into the "P" (Park) position and always manually engage the emergency parking brake before leaving the vehicle.

SUBARU OUTBACK & LEGACY

Subaru is recalling 118,723 2020-2022 Subaru Outback station wagons and Legacy sedans because the passenger airbags may not go off in a crash. Due to a manufacturing defect, the front passenger seat occupant detection system (ODS) sensors could crack and allow moisture in, which could cause a short circuit. If this happens, the passenger airbag may not deploy in a crash, which could increase the risk of injury to vehicle occupants. Both the airbag warning and passenger airbag "off" lights will illuminate if the passenger airbag is shut off.
What to do: Subaru dealerships will replace faulty sensors with new ones, free of charge. Subaru may also reimburse some owners who paid for this repair already. Owners may contact Subaru customer service at 844-373-6614. The NHTSA campaign number is 24V227, and Subaru's own number for this recall is WRA-24.

PROCTER & GAMBLE LAUNDRY DETERGENT PACKETS

Procter & Gamble is recalling about 8.2 million Tide Pods, Gain Flings, Ace Pods, and Ariel Pods liquid laundry detergent packets packaged in flexible film bags. The outer packaging meant to prevent access to the contents can split open near the zipper track, posing a risk of serious injury to children and other vulnerable people if the contents of the packets are ingested, as well as posing a risk of skin or eye injuries. Ingestion of a large quantity of any surfactant-containing household cleaning products can cause death for those with underlying health issues. The detergent was sold at Big Lots, CVS, Family Dollar, Home Depot, Sam's Club, Target, Walmart, and other major stores nationwide and online at Amazon and other websites from September 2023 through present for $5 (one 12-count bag) to $30 (four 39-count bags in a box).
What to do: Put the recalled bags out of sight and reach of children. Call 833-347-5764 or go to pg.com/bags for a full refund and a free replacement child-resistant bag to store the product. Consumers can also receive a cabinet lock for securing laundry materials. Check the lot code on your bag. Recalled lot codes will be listed at pg.com/bags and are found on the bottom of the package. Consumers with recalled bags will need to submit a photo of the bag product, showing the lot code.

INSIGNIA AIR FRYERS

Best Buy is recalling about 187,400 Insignia air fryers and air fryer ovens because they can overheat, causing the handles to melt or break, posing fire and burn hazards. Additionally, the air fryer ovens can overheat and the glass on the door can shatter, posing fire, burn, and laceration hazards. The fryers were sold at Best Buy stores nationwide and online at bestbuy.com, ebay.com, and third-party sellers from November 2021 through November 2023 for $32 to $180.
What to do: Stop using the air fryers and air fryer ovens. Call Best Buy at 800-566-7498 or go to recallrtr.com/airfryer for instructions on how to submit photos of the recalled unit(s), the model number, purchase receipt, and how to destroy the unit. Owners can receive a refund in the form of a refund check or a Best Buy store credit in the amount on the purchase receipt, or the average sales price for the model if no receipt is provided. Do not return the recalled air fryers or air fryer ovens to Best Buy stores.

BERKLEY JENSEN CITRONELLA TIKI TORCHES

BJ's Wholesale Club is recalling about 90,000 Berkley Jensen citronella 72-inch tiki torches because the tiki torch top can break open and/or fall off while lit, posing a burn hazard. The torches were sold exclusively at BJ's Wholesale Club stores nationwide and online at bjs.com from January 2015 through November 2023 for about $13.
What to do: Stop using the torches. Call BJ's Wholesale Club at 800-257-2582 or go to bjs.com for details and to get a full refund. Owners should destroy and dispose of the torches or empty the fuel reservoir and return them to BJ's Wholesale Club to receive a refund.

STARBUCKS HOLIDAY GIFT SETS

Nestlé USA is recalling about 440,500 metallic mugs included in 2023 Starbucks-branded holiday gift sets because if microwaved or filled with very hot liquid, the mugs can overheat or break, posing burn and laceration hazards. The sets were sold online and in-store at Target and Walmart, and through Nexcom nationwide from November 2023 through January 2024 for about $10, $13, or $20.
What to do: Stop using the mugs and return them to the place of purchase for a refund. Call 800-681-1676 or go to nestleusa.com/media/pressreleases/metallicmugrecall for details.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (KIA); CPSC (INSIGNIA)

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

Why You Still Need Sunscreen

No matter what your age, you can help prevent skin cancer and even reduce wrinkles with the right protection. Here, our top picks.

by Sally Wadyka

BEST LOTION

COPPERTONE WATER BABIES LOTION SPF 50 $9

100 OVERALL SCORE

BEST SPRAY

EUCERIN ADVANCED HYDRATION SPRAY SPF 50 $10

88 OVERALL SCORE

BEST FOR FACE

BLACK GIRL SUNSCREEN MAKE IT MATTE GEL SPF 45 $22

67 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

YOU'VE PROBABLY heard that the sun does most of its dirty work on our skin when we're kids. Even though that myth was debunked decades ago, the idea persists. That may be why only 57 percent of people 55 and older use sunscreen when they're in the sun, according to a March 2024 CR nationally representative survey of 2,000 U.S. adults. And 14 percent of older adults don't take any steps to protect their skin from the sun.

That's a mistake. "Sun damage is cumulative," says Henry Lim, MD, a dermatologist at Henry Ford Health in Detroit. "If you continue to expose your skin to the sun's ultraviolet rays, the damage will continue—no matter what age you are."

Taking action now can help protect your skin from further harm and possibly even reverse some damage. The first step: finding an effective sunscreen—one you don't mind wearing every day. See our full ratings, starting on page 21.

How the Sun Ages Your Skin

Most of the skin changes we see as we get older don't come from the aging process but from the sun's UV rays. That's true for all skin tones, though changes tend to occur earlier in those with light skin.

UVA rays penetrate the skin's deeper layers, damaging the collagen and elastin that keep skin looking young and smooth. That results in wrinkles, brown spots, sagging, and other signs of skin aging. UVB rays, which affect the outer layer of skin, cause sunburn. Both types alter DNA in the skin cells, which can trigger changes that can lead to skin cancer.

Fortunately, no matter your age or the extent of damage you've accrued, "it's still not a lost cause," says Karen Connolly, MD, a dermatologist at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Basking Ridge, N.J. "Start doing a better job with sun protection now and you may still slow down the rate at which your skin ages."

You might also be able to turn back time a bit. "Even if you have a few wrinkles and dark spots, some of that may be reversed from regular use of sunscreen," Connolly says.

Your Risk of Skin Cancer

Of course, it's not just about how your skin looks: Shielding yourself from the sun also helps prevent skin cancer. Rates steadily increase with age. Of the 149 people with a history of skin cancer in CR's survey, 58 percent were diagnosed at age 55 or older.

Basal cell carcinoma, the most common type of skin cancer, rarely affects anyone under 40 and is most common in those 70 and older. Rates of squamous cell carcinoma reach their highest levels in those ages 70 to 79. The risk for melanoma, which can be deadly, rises in adults with each decade, peaking in people in their 80s.

Sun exposure early in life contributes to your risk, but skin cancers "require multiple mutations to arise in the skin cells' DNA," says Paul Nghiem, MD, a dermatologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle. "When you continue to expose your skin to UV rays, they act like fertilizer for any existing damage, making the cells grow more mutations. With age, the repair process slows down and more mutations stick around."

The immune system also becomes less robust as you get older, which can contribute to the risk of developing skin cancer. "Sun exposure suppresses the skin's immune system," Lim says. "And if it's not able to mount a strong response, it's less able to repair DNA damage."

Best Strategies for Sun Protection

Staying in the shade, covering up with clothing, and wearing a hat will help shield your skin from the sun. But any exposed skin should be covered with sunscreen, and you should use it every day, something just 11 percent of the people in CR's survey said they did. Here are some other important tips:

▶ **Pick a CR-recommended sunscreen.** A high-quality sunscreen has an SPF of at least 30. (SPF reflects how well a sunscreen protects against UVB rays.) It should also be broad-spectrum, meaning it shields against both UVA and UVB.

But you can't just go by the label. CR's tests over the years show that the protection offered by a sunscreen doesn't always match the SPF listed on the package. In fact, as the last column in our ratings charts show, 24 of the 77 products had a CR average tested SPF of less than 15, though all of them were labeled SPF 30 or higher.

We asked the Personal Care Products Association, which represents sunscreen manufacturers, about the differences between CR's test results and the label claims. A spokesperson for the group said that our testing methods differed from the FDA's and "can't be directly compared to a label claim." But CR's sunscreen testers note that we use statistical analyses and other methods to validate our results. For details, see How We Test on page 23.

We've also found significant differences among products in how effectively they block UVA radiation. The standard test for UVA in the U.S. is pass-fail. But CR's test, similar to the one used in Europe, is more sensitive and allows us to measure the degree of UVA protection each sunscreen provides.

Bottom line: Our 15 recommended products will give you the best protection, but those with an Overall Score of at least 61 are also acceptable.

PHOTO: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH; ICONS: ELIAS STEIN

▶ **Choose a "chemical" sunscreen.** Our top-performing sunscreens use chemical UV filters, such as avobenzone or octocrylene. These work by absorbing into the skin and soaking up UV rays. Mineral sunscreens—those with only zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, or both—sit on the skin's surface and deflect UV rays.

Some people prefer mineral sunscreens because chemicals irritate their skin or they're concerned by reports indicating that some of those ingredients may harm the environment or pose health risks. But our tests have found that mineral sunscreens "consistently fall in the middle of the pack or lower in our ratings," says Susan Booth, who oversees CR's sunscreen testing.

And it's important to balance the possible risks posed by chemical sunscreens with their known benefits. "We don't have conclusive evidence that any sunscreen ingredients are causing harm," says Lim at Henry Ford Health, "but we do know that unprotected sun exposure can lead to skin cancer."

If you want to play it extra safe, avoid chemical sunscreens with oxybenzone or octinoxate, the two ingredients that have raised the most concern. Just one of the sunscreens in our ratings, La Roche-Posay Anthelios Ultra Light Spray Lotion SPF 60, contains oxybenzone, and none have octinoxate.

▶ **If you prefer a mineral sunscreen,** choose one that tested at least an SPF 15 and had high marks for UVA protection, such as Badger Active Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented or Blue Lizard Sport Mineral Spray SPF 50+ Unscented. Diligently reapplying is especially important with mineral sunscreens.

▶ **Apply it right.** For lotions, use a teaspoon-sized dollop on your face and neck and, depending on what you're wearing, one for your torso, one for your back, and one for each of your arms and legs. For a spray, hold it close to your skin, spray until the skin glistens, and then rub it in. Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours or right after swimming or sweating, especially if you're using a lower-performing product.

▶ **Cover up.** You can minimize the amount of sunscreen you need by wearing a rash guard instead of a bathing suit, or other clothing that shields your skin. You can opt for UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) clothing, but previous CR tests found that items made with polyester, spandex, or tightly woven cotton without a UPF claim on the label were similarly effective.

GET GREAT PROTECTION FOR LESS

91¢ per ounce

$ Equate Ultra Lotion SPF 50

68 OVERALL SCORE

vs.

SAVE 36%

58¢ per ounce

Solimo (Amazon) Baby Lotion SPF 50

64 OVERALL SCORE

Both are inexpensive, but Solimo was the lowest-priced product in our tests and works nearly as well as Equate. Adults can use baby sunscreen (and vice versa); there's no difference between the two in safety or performance.

$2.60 per ounce

Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Body Mist SPF 70

66 OVERALL SCORE

vs.

SAVE 21%

$1.69 per ounce

$ Neutrogena Beach Defense Water+Sun Protection Spray SPF 50

71 OVERALL SCORE

Two sprays from the same brand but with different prices—and the cheaper one works better. It's a no-brainer.

$21.59 per ounce

EleVen by Venus Williams Ace the Day Face Lotion SPF 30

44 OVERALL SCORE

vs.

SAVE 65%

$7.60 per ounce

✓ La Roche-Posay Anthelios 60 Melt-In Sunscreen Milk

73 OVERALL SCORE

Both are high-end cosmetic brands, but La Roche is a much better deal and more effective than EleVen. Although it's not specifically labeled for the face, it's lightweight and fine to use there.

Ratings > **Pick Your Protection** All of the sunscreens below are water-resistant for 80 minutes unless otherwise noted.

Green Choice

Sunscreens that CR's sustainability experts say are better for the environment get this symbol. These products contain mineral active ingredients (titanium dioxide, zinc oxide) and have an Overall Score of at least 40. Packaging must be minimal and recyclable. For more, go to **CR.org/gcsunscreens.**

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Cost per oz.	Package price/ package size	UVA protection	SPF	CR's average tested SPF
LOTIONS						
Coppertone Water Babies Lotion SPF 50	100	$1.13	$9/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏫	64
La Roche-Posay Anthelios Kids SPF 50 Face and Body	90	$4.93	$33/6.7 oz.	⏫	⏫	41
Everyday Humans Oh My Bod Lotion SPF 50	83	$5.15	$18/3.4 oz.	🔼	⏫	55
Eucerin Advanced Hydration Lotion SPF 30	75	$2.00	$10/5.0 oz.	⏫	➖	27
La Roche-Posay Anthelios 60 Melt-In Sunscreen Milk	73	$7.60	$38/5.0 oz.	⏫	🔼	33
Alba Botanica Hawaiian Lotion SPF 30 Aloe Vera	70	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.	⏫	➖	26
Dermalogica Sport Protection Lotion SPF 50	68	$7.17	$38/5.3 oz.	⏫	➖	27
Equate (Walmart) Ultra Lotion SPF 50	68	$0.91	$7/8.0 oz.	⏫	🔼	31
Solimo (Amazon) Baby Lotion SPF 50	64	$0.58	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	🔼	31
Coppertone Sport 4-in-1 Performance Lotion SPF 50	63	$1.57	$11/7.0 oz.	🔼	🔼	32
Equate (Walmart) Sport Lotion SPF 50	61	$0.61	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	➖	29
Equate (Walmart) Ultra Light Lotion for Face & Body SPF 50	60	$0.63	$5/8.0 oz.	🔼	➖	28
Banana Boat Sport Ultra Lotion SPF 50+	57	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	20
Up & Up (Target) Sport Lotion SPF 50	56	$0.67	$7/10.4 oz.	🔼	➖	26
Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Invisible Body Serum SPF 50	55	$3.94	$13/3.3 oz.	⏫	⏬	20
Black Girl Sunscreen Ultra Sheer Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	55	$6.33	$19/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Badger Active Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented [1][2]	55	$6.21	$18/2.9 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Neutrogena Invisible Daily Defense Lotion SPF 60+	55	$5.23	$16/3.0 oz.	🔼	➖	25
Aveeno Protect + Hydrate Lotion SPF 60	50	$3.67	$11/3.0 oz.	🔼	➖	21
Trader Joe's Face & Body Lotion SPF 30	47	$1.00	$6/6.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	12
Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Lotion SPF 50	47	$1.36	$11/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	16
Neutrogena Pure & Free Baby Lotion SPF 50 [1]	46	$4.83	$15/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	14
Hawaiian Tropic Everyday Active Sport Lotion SPF 30	46	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	11
Neutrogena Sheer Zinc Mineral Lotion SPF 50 [1]	45	$4.83	$15/3.0 oz.	🔼	⏬	16
Badger Kids Mineral Cream SPF 40 Tangerine & Vanilla [1]	45	$6.21	$18/2.9 oz.	⏫	⏬	11
Thinkbaby Lotion SPF 50 Lightly Scented [1]	44	$5.17	$16/3.0 oz.	⏫	⏬	12
Neutrogena Hydro Boost Water Gel SPF 30	43	$4.00	$12/3.0 oz.	🔼	⏬	16

[1] Mineral sunscreen. Contains zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, or both as the only active ingredients. [2] Water-resistant for 40 minutes.

PHOTOS: THIS SPREAD AND FOLLOWING SPREAD: CONSUMER REPORTS (14)

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Cost per oz.	Package price/ package size	UVA protection	SPF	CR's average tested SPF
LOTIONS *Continued*						
California Kids Supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+	42	$8.28	$24/2.9 oz.			19
Sun Bum Premium Lotion SPF 30	42	$2.31	$19/8.0 oz.			9
Babo Botanicals Clear Zinc Lotion SPF 30 Fragrance Free	42	$5.83	$18/3.0 oz.			14
Blue Lizard Sensitive Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	29	$4.00	$20/5.0 oz.			14
CeraVe Hydrating Sheer Face & Body Lotion SPF 30	28	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.			10
Coppertone Pure & Simple Mineral Lotion SPF 50	28	$1.92	$12/6.0 oz.			7
Banana Boat Kids Sport Lotion SPF 50+	27	$2.17	$13/6.0 oz.			8
Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Hybrid Lotion SPF 50 Fragrance Free	23	$6.33	$19/3.0 oz.			13
Black Girl Sunscreen Kids Lotion SPF 50	18	$3.33	$10/3.0 oz.			13
Australian Gold Botanical Mineral Lotion SPF 30	18	$3.60	$18/5.0 oz.			4
Coppertone Kids Tear Free Lotion SPF 50	17	$1.25	$10/8.0 oz.			13
SPRAYS						
Eucerin Advanced Hydration Spray SPF 50	88	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.			39
Black Girl Sunscreen Kids Spray & Play SPF 50	77	$2.00	$12/6.0 oz.			36
Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+	74	$1.00	$6/6.0 oz.			34
Neutrogena Beach Defense Water+Sun Protection Spray SPF 50	71	$1.69	$11/6.5 oz.			32
Black Girl Sunscreen Make It Glow Spray SPF 30	68	$6.33	$19/3.0 oz.			26
Sun Bum Premium Spray SPF 50	67	$3.08	$19/6.0 oz.			33
Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Body Mist SPF 70	66	$2.60	$13/5.0 oz.			41
Australian Gold Ultimate Hydration Continuous Spray SPF 30	66	$2.08	$13/6.0 oz.			21
Equate (Walmart) Sport Spray SPF 50	65	$0.89	$5/5.5 oz.			30
La Roche-Posay Anthelios Ultra Light Spray Lotion SPF 60	65	$5.40	$27/5.0 oz.			26
Up & Up (Target) Sport Spray SPF 50	64	$0.91	$5/5.5 oz.			29
Alba Botanica Hawaiian Spray SPF 50 Coconut	63	$2.00	$10/5.0 oz.			31
Coppertone Complete Spray SPF 50	58	$2.18	$12/5.5 oz.			23
Coppertone Sport 4-in-1 Performance Spray SPF 50	55	$1.82	$10/5.5 oz.			19
Banana Boat Sport Cool Zone Spray SPF 30	53	$2.08	$13/6.0 oz.			18
Hawaiian Tropic Skin Defense Mist SPF 30	51	$2.94	$10/3.4 oz.			15
Coola Classic Spray SPF 70 Peach Blossom	51	$4.67	$28/6.0 oz.			16

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Cost per oz.	Package price/ package size	UVA protection	SPF	CR's average tested SPF
SPRAYS *Continued*						
Blue Lizard Sport Mineral Spray SPF 50+ Unscented [1]	50	$4.00	$20/5.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	15
Coppertone Glow Shimmer Spray SPF 30	49	$2.40	$12/5.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	13
Oars + Alps Hydrating Antioxidant Spray SPF 50	47	$3.00	$18/6.0 oz.	▲	▼	20
Banana Boat Kids Clear Spray SPF 65+	45	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.	●	●	22
Hawaiian Tropic Weightless Hydration Clear Spray SPF 50	43	$1.83	$11/6.0 oz.	▲	▼	18
Hawaiian Tropic Weightless Hydration Spray SPF 30	42	$1.67	$10/6.0 oz.	▲▲	▼▼	9
Soleil Toujours Clean Conscious Antioxidant Mist SPF 50	16	$6.00	$36/6.0 oz.	▼▼	▼	14
FOR THE FACE						
✓ **Black Girl Sunscreen** Make It Matte Gel SPF 45	67	$12.94	$22/1.7 oz.	▲	▲	33
Hawaiian Tropic Sheer Touch Oil-Free Face Serum SPF 30	60	$8.57	$12/1.4 oz.	▲▲	▼	19
Neutrogena Clear Face Serum SPF 60+ Fragrance Free	57	$8.24	$14/1.7 oz.	▲	●	26
Neutrogena Sport Face Oil-Free Lotion SPF 70+	53	$4.20	$11/2.5 oz.	●	▲	33
Supergoop Every. Single. Face. Watery Lotion SPF 50 [2]	52	$20.00	$34/1.7 oz.	▲▲	▼	16
Banana Boat Sport Ultra Face Lotion SPF 30	51	$3.67	$11/3.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	15
Banana Boat Protection + Vitamins Face Lotion SPF 50+	51	$5.00	$10/2.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	16
Hawaiian Tropic Weightless Hydration Face Lotion SPF 30	51	$5.88	$10/1.7 oz.	▲▲	▼	15
EleVen by Venus Williams Ace the Day Face Lotion SPF 30 [1]	44	$21.59	$38/1.8 oz.	▲▲	▼	11
Aveeno Positively Mineral Sensitive Skin Face Lotion SPF 50 [1]	44	$6.00	$12/2.0 oz.	▲	▼	15
Neutrogena Sheer Zinc Mineral Face Lotion SPF 50 [1]	43	$6.50	$13/2.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	13
Banana Boat Light as Air Face Lotion SPF 50+	43	$4.00	$12/3.0 oz.	▲▲	▼▼	13
Sun Bum Glow SPF 30 Lotion	42	$9.25	$19/2.0 oz.	▲▲	▼▼	10
Australian Gold Plant Based Face Lotion SPF 50 Aloe & Coconut	42	$4.17	$13/3.0 oz.	▲▲	▼	11
Cetaphil Sheer Mineral Face Lotion SPF 50 [1]	26	$5.88	$10/1.7 oz.	●	▼▼	8

HOW WE TEST: We use the Food and Drug Administration's sunscreen testing protocol as a model. But as with all products, we do our own scientific, laboratory-based testing to identify differences in performance and give consumers a comparative evaluation. We buy sunscreens at retailers, the way consumers do, and test three samples of each product, each from different manufacturing batches. For **SPF,** we test the sunscreens on three people, which is fewer than the FDA's protocol calls for, but we use a statistical analysis to verify our results. A technician applies a standard amount of each product to a 2x3-inch rectangle on a panelist's back before they soak in water for 40 or 80 minutes based on the product's water resistance claims. Then we expose smaller sections of the rectangle to five or six intensities of simulated sunlight based on how quickly the panelist's skin burns without protection. We also use a reference sunscreen with known performance to ensure testing accuracy. A day later, a technician examines the skin for redness and determines the sunscreen's SPF. To test for **UVA**, we apply sunscreen to plastic plates, expose them to UV light, and measure the amount of UVA and UVB rays that are absorbed. This test, like the UVA test in Europe, uses a process similar to the UVA test the FDA requires. But the test we use allows us to determine the degree of UVA protection, while the FDA test does not. The FDA test is pass-fail; a sunscreen that just passes gets the same designation—broad-spectrum—as one that screens out even more UVA. Our ratings are developed from the average results of all the SPF and UVA tests for a sunscreen, as well as how much the average CR-tested SPF varies from the SPF listed on the label.

[1] Mineral sunscreen. Contains zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, or both as the only active ingredients. [2] Water-resistant for 40 minutes.

Disney+
Disney+
optimum.
tubi
tubi
hulu
hulu
fubo

CABLE VS. STREAMING

WATCH EVERYTHING FOR LESS

How to beat high prices by putting together your own package of TV entertainment.

by James K. Willcox
Photo Illustrations by Lisa Sheehan

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS HAVE CUT THE CORD ON CABLE TV (5 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS IN 2023 ALONE), MOSTLY BECAUSE THE PRICES WERE JUST TOO HIGH.

Many are signing up instead for "live TV" streaming services like YouTube TV and Hulu + Live TV, which offer loads of the same channels, often for less money.

But will you pay less if you stream all your news programs and other favorite TV shows? It's possible you won't save at all. That's because prices for many streaming services have been rising rapidly. To reproduce what a typical cable TV contract provides, you could easily spend $80 or more a month on a live TV streaming service.

So how to decide whether to stick with your cable provider or switch to one of these streaming services? And what if you also want to watch movies and TV series from familiar on-demand streaming services like Netflix? Can you save money on those?

To get the best possible deals (with the fewest hassles), read on.

1 KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

Chances are, you want to watch live programming (like you do with cable) so that you can tune in over breakfast or in the evening to get the news on networks such as ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, and Fox.

There are three basic ways to get those channels:

- **Traditional cable or satellite TV.**
- **A cable replacement streaming service,** such as Hulu + Live TV or YouTube TV.
- **An indoor antenna**—a great option if your home gets good reception, which is more likely if you live near a large city.

Most of us want other kinds of programming, too. About half of American households use four or more streaming services, according to a nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,097 U.S. adults conducted in February 2023.

No matter what, you'll still need an internet connection from a provider such as Comcast/Xfinity or Verizon to get online for all kinds of purposes, including streaming.

If you get your cable TV and internet from the same company, like many of us do, you can cancel just the TV part of your package if you decide to switch to a cable replacement streaming service.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES (HAND)

Streaming May Cost Less

Many people can save by replacing cable TV with a streaming service that includes broadcasts from networks like NBC, CNN, and HGTV. This chart shows projected monthly savings for a household in Connecticut that switches from a Spectrum cable TV plan to YouTube TV. (Cable prices vary by location, and so do the networks available from services like YouTube TV.) Both scenarios include Max and Netflix subscriptions.

CABLE		STREAMING	
INTERNET	$84.99	INTERNET	$84.99
WIFI SERVICE	$7.00	WIFI SERVICE	$7.00
SPECTRUM TV SELECT	$89.99	YOUTUBE TV With sales tax	$77.62
BROADCAST TV SURCHARGE	$25.75		—
EQUIPMENT CHARGE Receivers for 2 TVs	$25.00		—
TAXES & OTHER FEES	$18.14		—
MAX Ad-free, with sales tax	$17.01	MAX Ad-free, with sales tax	$17.01
NETFLIX Premium, with sales tax	$24.45	NETFLIX Premium, with sales tax	$24.45
TOTAL Monthly	$292.33	TOTAL Monthly	$211.07

2 CHECK YOUR BILL

Let's assume that you currently have a cable TV plan. To see how you could save money, start by looking at a recent billing statement, then compare your options.

You'll probably notice surprising fees with labels like "broadcast TV" or "regional sports," which can add $20 or more to your monthly cable bill. Consulting your current bill can help you see whether you'd save money by canceling cable and switching to a cable replacement streaming service with live TV channels. (See a list of these services in "Best Live TV Streaming Services," at right.)

When you look at your statement, note what tier of service you're paying for. Cable packages vary depending on where you live, but, for example, the least expensive choice from Optimum in Nyack, N.Y., is a $40-a-month Basic TV plan with about 50 channels. The bill can jump to $135 a month for the company's top-tier Premier TV plan, with about 420 channels, including premium networks such as Starz. And that's before taxes and add-on fees, such as equipment rentals.

If the extra channels in your cable provider's higher-tier packages aren't all that appealing to you, you may want to switch to a cheaper plan.

Compare Your Options

Now that you know exactly what you're getting from your cable company and you've acquainted yourself with the other packages it offers, you're ready to comparison shop.

First, check other companies if you're lucky enough to have a choice of providers—either another cable company or a satellite TV service such as DirecTV or Dish.

See whether a competitor can offer a better deal. Often, new subscribers can get a lower rate or a better channel selection than a current customer can. Just make sure to ask about the terms of any promotional rate that you're offered. For instance, if you need to sign up for a two-year contract, will the rates go up during the second year? Will you be hit with cancellation fees if you want to drop the service early?

Next, compare the cost and channel lineup of your plan against cable replacement streaming services, such as Hulu + Live TV or YouTube TV, that can provide all, or most, of the channels you really want. The local channel lineup for these services varies somewhat by region, so you'll need to enter your ZIP code on each website to see what's available.

When you compare the prices, what you see advertised really is what you'll pay—no cable TV-style oddball fees will be added to the monthly bill, though there may be sales tax where you live.

You might get some extra content, too. For instance, if you choose

Best Live TV Streaming Services

You have several choices if you want a streaming service that replicates what you get from a traditional cable package—meaning local stations plus cable channels.

Before signing up, browse each service's channel listing to ensure you'll be able to watch what you want. Some services have fewer channels than others, and it varies by region, especially when it comes to local channels.

Next, consider the extras each service offers. If you can't watch most of your favorites live, you'll want a generous DVR feature to record shows. Each service also offers its own mix of add-on packages and special live broadcasts. For instance, you can get a discount on NFL Sunday Ticket with YouTube TV and lots of pay-per-view sporting events on Fubo.

Some cable replacement services offer a free trial period, but you need to provide your credit card info. Keep track of when the trial period ends so that you won't get charged if you decide to cancel.

DirecTV Stream

MONTHLY BILL: $80 to $165

This relatively pricey streaming service, owned by the satellite TV company, gives you more than 90 live TV channels in the Entertainment plan, plus on-demand titles. The Choice plan, which includes regional sports networks and both the MLB and NBA sports leagues, is now $109 a month. The priciest plan, Premier, costs $165 a month and comes with Max, Cinemax, Paramount+ with Showtime, and Starz. Late last year, DirecTV Stream got rid of its two-year contract requirement.

Philo

MONTHLY BILL: $25

Philo is a great choice if you can get local broadcast via an antenna, because you get about 70 cable channels but no local broadcasts. Philo is backed by several investors, including A&E, AMC, Discovery, Scripps, and Paramount. It has a deal with Kin for female-focused lifestyle content, and now has a second season of its original series, including "Boss Moves," with "Love & Hip Hop Atlanta" star Rasheeda Frost. As a bonus, Philo now includes the ad-supported AMC+ service, normally $5 a month, at no extra charge.

Fubo

MONTHLY BILL: $80 to $100

This is a great streaming service for sports fans. The basic $80 Pro plan has 199 channels with local stations in most markets, plus lots of sports networks and many cable channels. Stepping up to the $90 Elite plan gets you Fubo Extra, with 57 more sports and lifestyle channels, while the $100 Premier plan has even more channels, as well as Showtime and Sports Plus, which includes NFL RedZone. On the downside, Fubo now charges up to $15 a month extra for regional sports, depending on where you live.

Sling TV

MONTHLY BILL: $40 to $60

Sling TV has two relatively slim plans; many people get both. The $40 Orange package features about 30 cable channels but no broadcast TV networks. (That's no problem if you have an antenna and good reception.) You can play content on only one TV at a time. The $45-a-month Sling Blue plan supports three users and has a different mix of about 40 channels, including some local broadcasts (Fox and NBC), plus regional sports. A combined plan costs $60. Sling TV now offers ABC stations in eight cities, but CBS locals are still missing everywhere.

Hulu + Live TV

MONTHLY BILL: $77 to $90

Hulu + Live TV offers 90 channels, including the major broadcast channels in most locations, along with Disney+ and ESPN+. Hulu presents an increasing number of originals, such as "Only Murders in the Building" and "Under the Bridge," along with exclusive content like FX's "The Bear." The pricing tiers differ by where you see ads. The $77 plan has ads on everything. Step up to the $90 plan and you'll skip the ads on Disney+ and Hulu + Live TV, while seeing ads on ESPN+. Several add-ons are available, including premium channels such as Max.

YouTube TV

MONTHLY BILL: $73

YouTube TV is a solid option for anyone looking to save money without giving up sports or major cable channels. It provides more than 100 channels, including all the major broadcast networks, cable channels, and major sports networks such as CBS Sports, ESPN, and Fox Sports, along with the MLB, NBA, and NFL league networks. It's also the home of NFL Sunday Ticket, a longtime DirecTV exclusive. YouTube TV has a 4K Plus add-on ($10 a month) that lets you watch videos in 4K and view recordings offline on a mobile device.

Hulu + Live TV, you'll also get Hulu Originals such as "The Handmaid's Tale," plus thousands of other shows and movies in Hulu's on-demand streaming library.

Finally, see whether you can get local channels with an indoor antenna. These can be unobtrusive and cost under $40. More than 20 million people in the U.S. now use antennas, though you need to live somewhere with good reception.

With an antenna, the picture quality might be even better than what cable provides, and you'll get extra channels with programs such as older TV shows or public channels that may not be available on cable or anywhere else. (Just check the return policy before you buy, in case you don't get good reception.)

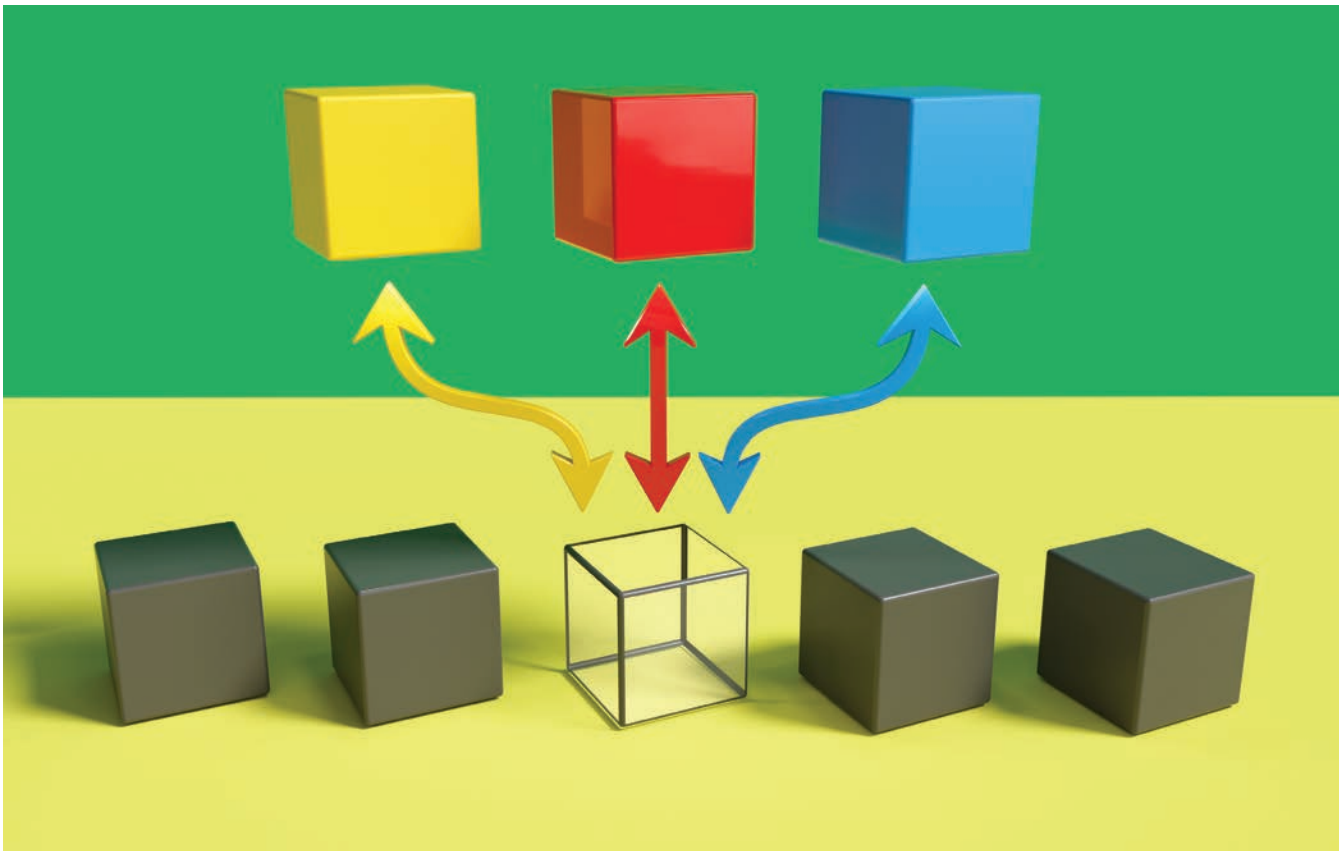
Do a Cord-Cutting Test Drive

Let's say you're on the fence about cutting the cord and using a cable replacement service instead. You don't need to cancel your cable contract right away. In fact, it's smarter not to.

Some streaming services offer a one-week free trial, so you can give a few services a try while keeping your current cable contract. The differences go beyond the channel lineup. Each of these services has its own menu system, and you may feel more comfortable with a particular option's system. You'll also be able to see whether you actually miss any cable channels that you can't get through a service you're trying out.

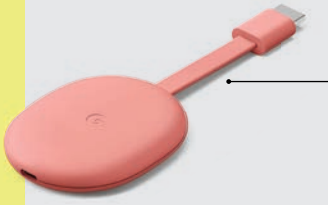
While you're kicking the tires on these live TV streaming services, you'll be able to see whether your internet service is fast and reliable enough. Streaming video requires a relatively fast internet connection, plus adequate WiFi within your house. That's getting trickier now that many homes have a dozen or more devices connected to the internet–from laptops to phones to smart thermostats and door locks, in addition to multiple TVs.

If you notice movies pausing or the images getting coarser and less detailed while you're watching, your internet connection is likely to blame. You might be able to fix that by paying more to get faster speeds or by investing in a mesh router system, but you'll want to make sure that problem is solved before canceling your cable service.



Top-Rated Streaming Devices

Most new TVs are "smart," letting you stream content over WiFi with no extra hardware. But you might want a separate streaming device anyway. It might include more streaming apps than your TV, or be faster and easier to use. Also, you can add streaming devices to make all the TVs in your home work with the same, familiar controls, even if the sets come from different brands.



Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features		
			Ease of use	Features	Data privacy	Data security	Picture quality	Platform	Dolby Vision	HDR10+
HD STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES										
Amazon Fire TV Stick (3rd Gen)	69	$40	↑	⇈	I	I	⇈	Fire TV		●
Amazon Fire TV Stick Lite with Alexa Voice Remote Lite	64	$30	I	⇈	↓	I	⇈	Fire TV		●
Google Chromecast with Google TV (HD)	58	$30	I	↑	I	↑	⇈	Google TV		●
Onn Full HD Streaming Device	57	$15	I	↑	↓	I	⇈	Google TV		
Roku Express	49	$30	I	I	↓	I	⇈	Roku		
4K STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES										
Nvidia Shield TV Pro	82	$200	↑	⇈	I	I	⇈	Google TV	●	
Nvidia Shield TV	77	$150	↑	⇈	I	I	⇈	Google TV	●	
Amazon Fire TV Cube (3rd Gen)	75	$140	↑	⇈	I	I	⇈	Fire TV	●	●
Roku Ultra (2022)	73	$100	⇈	↑	↓	I	⇈	Roku	●	●
Roku Streaming Stick 4K	68	$50	↑	↑	↓	↓	⇈	Roku	●	●
Google Chromecast with Google TV	67	$50	I	⇈	I	↑	⇈	Google TV	●	●
Roku Express 4K with Voice Remote Pro	67	$50	⇈	↑	↓	I	⇈	Roku		●
Apple TV 4K (128GB, 2022)	67	$150	I	⇈	I	↑	⇈	Apple	●	●
Roku Express 4K+	65	$40	↑	↑	↓	I	⇈	Roku		●
TiVo Stream 4K	62	$40	I	↑	↓	I	⇈	Google TV	●	
Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K	61	$50	I	↑	I	I	⇈	Fire TV	●	●
Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K Max (2nd Gen)	61	$60	I	↑	I	I	⇈	Fire TV	●	●
Onn 4K Streaming Box	57	$20	I	↑	↓	I	⇈	Google TV		

HOW WE TEST: Ease of use reflects how easy the device is to use on a normal basis, including the remote and menu system.

Features reflects the presence or absence of features, including the number of streaming services. **Data privacy** is a measure of how the player collects, shares, and uses your data. **Data security** is a measure of how well the player and its service provider protect your data.

Picture quality includes image clarity, color accuracy, and contrast of the streaming video at the player's native resolution.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

3 SAVE EVEN MORE

Here are some surprising ways to get a better deal on cable and streaming.

Negotiate With Your Cable Provider

Let's say a cable replacement streaming service looks cheaper on paper than your current cable plan, and you're willing to make a change to pay less. Before you do, call your current pay TV provider (ask to speak to someone in the retention department) and say you're planning to make a switch unless they give you a better deal. Our surveys consistently show that the majority of customers who try to negotiate are successful, winning concessions such as a better price, an extension of a promotion, or premium channels at no added charge. You may end up paying less than if you cut the cord and switched to a streaming service.

Put All Your Streaming Service Subscriptions on One Card

Having all the payments on a single credit card will make it easier to keep track of all your services—and spot any you might want to cancel.

Sign Up for Ad-Supported Streaming Tiers

Many streaming services, including Disney+, Max, Netflix, Paramount+, and Peacock, now have less-expensive ad-supported tiers. Some are half the price of the ad-free versions.

Bundle Your Services

A number of streaming services offer bundles of content for a discount. For example, Disney offers Disney+, Hulu, and ESPN+ for $15, instead of the $25 they would cost if you subscribed separately. Sling TV gives you a $25 per month break if you get both its Blue and Orange plans together. Verizon +Play lets you bundle a few services, including Netflix and Starz, for a discount.

Drop Down to a Cheaper Cable Package

You may find that moving to a cheaper cable TV tier gives you all the content you want for less money, even if you add a streaming service or two to get what's missing.

See Whether You're Eligible for a Promotion

You can sometimes get a service for free through a promotion. For instance, T-Mobile offers customers deals on several services, including Apple TV+, Hulu, and Netflix, depending on the specifics of the customer's cellular plan. You can get Paramount+ for free with a Walmart+ membership.

Share an Account—While You Still Can

Many people share streaming account passwords, but the clock is ticking on this trick. Services including Disney, Hulu, and Netflix are starting to limit this practice, allowing only people living in the same home to share a subscription. The same change is coming to Max.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (HAND)

Free Streaming Services

It's hard to beat "free." The trade-off with these no-cost sources of entertainment? You'll have to watch ads. Many newer TVs also come with their own free streaming services. Samsung's, for example, is called Samsung TV Plus, while LG's free streaming service is labeled LG Channels.

Freevee

Previously called IMDb TV, Freevee is an offshoot of Amazon Prime Video. It offers live channels, on-demand classic TV shows and movies, and some original content. Fairly recent shows such as "Schitt's Creek" and "The Librarians" appear alongside oldies ("Bewitched," "Columbo") and original shows such as "Judy Justice" and "Bosch: Legacy."

BLKFAM

This streaming service, backed in part by Whoopi Goldberg, is focused on Black American family entertainment, with a content library that includes more than 20 syndicated series, 1,000-plus hours of new animation titles, dozens of new animated characters of color, and hundreds of hours of original music-driven content.

Hoopla

If you have a library card, Hoopla is your ticket to free movies, music, audiobooks, and comic books. Go to the site, find your library, and create an account with your library card. You check out online videos as though they were books. Another library-based service, Kanopy, focuses on acclaimed movies and documentaries; Hoopla has a broader range of content.

Pluto TV

Pluto TV, owned by Paramount, has about 250 live plus on-demand channels, drawing varied content from Paramount properties (BET, CBS, Comedy Central, MTV, Nickelodeon, and Paramount Pictures) and networks such as AMC, Bloomberg TV, CNN, Fox Sports, and NBC News Now. You can view now-classic movies—such as "Titanic"—along with some newer content.

The Roku Channel

The Roku Channel has lots of licensed TV shows and movies; there are more than 400 live channels and tens of thousands of free on-demand movies and TV shows. You can expect to see an increasing number of Roku Originals. Current examples include "Reptile Royalty," "UFO Cowboys," and "The Spiderwick Chronicles." A new series, called "Good Cop/Bad Cop," will debut next year starring Leighton Meester and Luke Cook as an odd-couple sibling detective team.

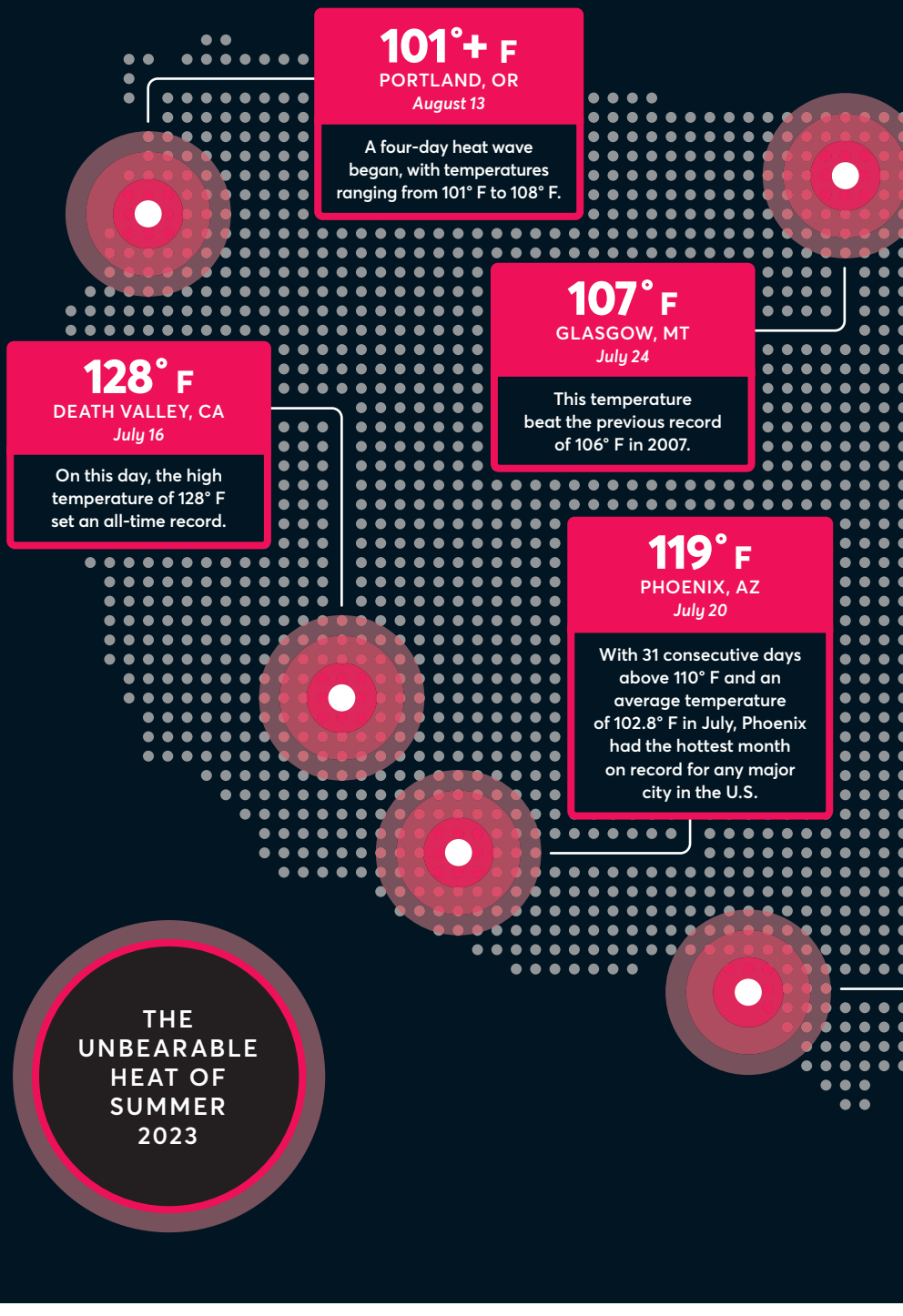
Tubi

Tubi, owned by Fox, has more than 50,000 titles, including selections from the libraries of Lionsgate, MGM, Paramount, and Warner Bros., plus networks such as Starz. The options range from old Chuck Norris films and classic indie titles ("Requiem for a Dream") to somewhat more recent movies such as "Black Adam." You get full seasons of TV shows old and (relatively) new. Warner Bros. Discovery is now providing 14 live channels to Tubi, plus hundreds of movies and TV shows.

STAY COOL EVEN IN EXTREME HEAT

Sweltering temperatures have become a worrisome part of summer's new normal. Here's what you need to know to stay comfortable and safe this season, wherever you are.

BY JANET SIROTO

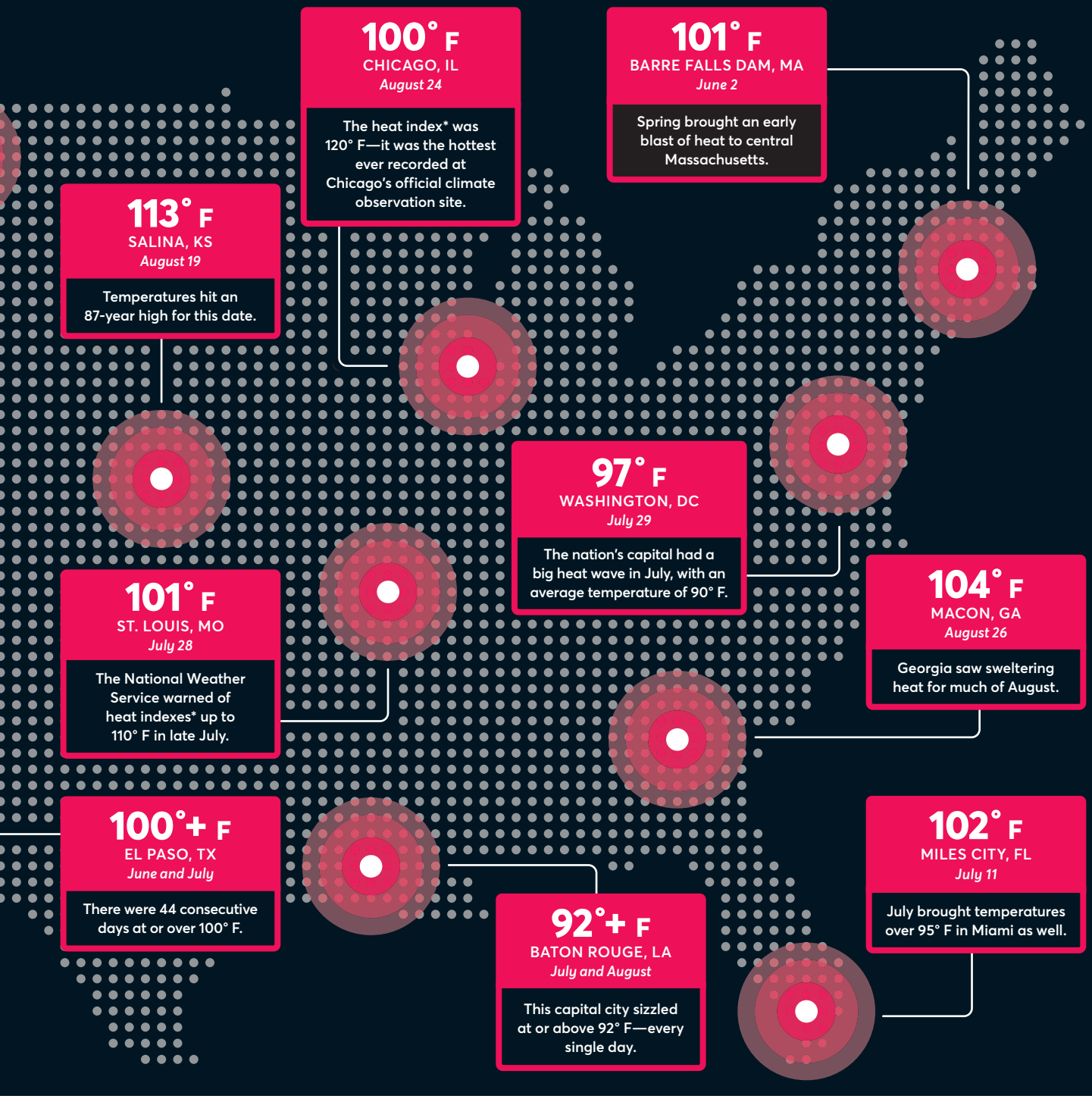

101°+ F
PORTLAND, OR
August 13
A four-day heat wave began, with temperatures ranging from 101° F to 108° F.
107° F
GLASGOW, MT
July 24
This temperature beat the previous record of 106° F in 2007.
128° F
DEATH VALLEY, CA
July 16
On this day, the high temperature of 128° F set an all-time record.
119° F
PHOENIX, AZ
July 20
With 31 consecutive days above 110° F and an average temperature of 102.8° F in July, Phoenix had the hottest month on record for any major city in the U.S.
THE UNBEARABLE HEAT OF SUMMER 2023

BROILING, SCORCHING, ROASTING.

We're running out of ways to describe our summer weather. Last year was one for the record books: Phoenix endured 31 days in a row above 110° F. Miami's heat index was over 100° F for 46 days straight. And even the Twin Cities of Minnesota had 33 days of 90° F (more than twice as many as average). Elsewhere on the globe, Sardinia, Italy, hit almost 119° F, while Japan recorded its hottest year in over 130 years.

Extremely hot weather isn't just unpleasant, it's a serious health risk. More than 1,200 people die from extreme heat every year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Last summer, we constantly saw heat- and air-quality-related issues, especially for those taking different medications for conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes," says Rachel Marquez, MD, family medicine physician with Kaiser Permanente in Virginia. "Heat-related illness—from the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY


100° F
CHICAGO, IL
August 24
The heat index* was 120° F—it was the hottest ever recorded at Chicago's official climate observation site.
101° F
BARRE FALLS DAM, MA
June 2
Spring brought an early blast of heat to central Massachusetts.
113° F
SALINA, KS
August 19
Temperatures hit an 87-year high for this date.
97° F
WASHINGTON, DC
July 29
The nation's capital had a big heat wave in July, with an average temperature of 90° F.
101° F
ST. LOUIS, MO
July 28
The National Weather Service warned of heat indexes* up to 110° F in late July.
104° F
MACON, GA
August 26
Georgia saw sweltering heat for much of August.
100°+ F
EL PASO, TX
June and July
There were 44 consecutive days at or over 100° F.
92°+ F
BATON ROUGE, LA
July and August
This capital city sizzled at or above 92° F—every single day.
102° F
MILES CITY, FL
July 11
July brought temperatures over 95° F in Miami as well.

dizziness, nausea, and cramping of heat exhaustion to the slurred speech and weakness of heatstroke—can happen more easily at lower body temperatures for these individuals."

Heat doesn't need to reach record levels to be dangerous. High humidity can increase the effects of heat even at lower temperatures, as can wildfire smoke and other air-quality issues, your age (adults 65 and older and children up to 4 years old are at greater risk), weight, and taking certain medications. Also, heat can trigger flare-ups in chronic conditions, including asthma, hypertension, migraines, rosacea, kidney disease, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Very hot weather may be here to stay, but a few simple moves can protect you from its worst effects. "You can prepare little by little—and it doesn't have to cost a lot," says Brenda Muhammad, executive director of Focusing Our Resources for Community Enlightenment, a nonprofit in Syracuse, N.Y. Read on for the best ways to cope—wherever you are.

Temperature Sources: NOAA, the Weather Channel, the city of St. Louis.
*An estimate of how hot it feels when air temperature and relative humidity are combined.

WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME

If you have air conditioning—like almost 90 percent of U.S. households, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's 2020 Residential Energy Consumption Survey—you still may struggle to stay cool on the hottest days. What's more, increased electricity use can lead to brownouts and outages. Here's how to prep for and handle a heat wave. ▼

PLAN AHEAD

▶ **Give your A/C some TLC.** Have your central air units serviced annually, and swap out the filters every one to two months during the cooling season. If they're clogged, you're not getting optimal cooling power.

▶ **Add insulation and seal up leaks, if possible.** Check your windows for gaps that can let hot air in and precious, pricey chilled air out. The Department of Energy recommends caulk for nonmoving elements (such as a fixed pane) and weather stripping for windows. For larger spaces around a window, use foam sealant.

▶ **Install window treatments.** Cellular shades can lower unwanted solar heat by up to 60 percent, window reflectors reflect heat back outside, and awnings will shade windows and outdoor areas.

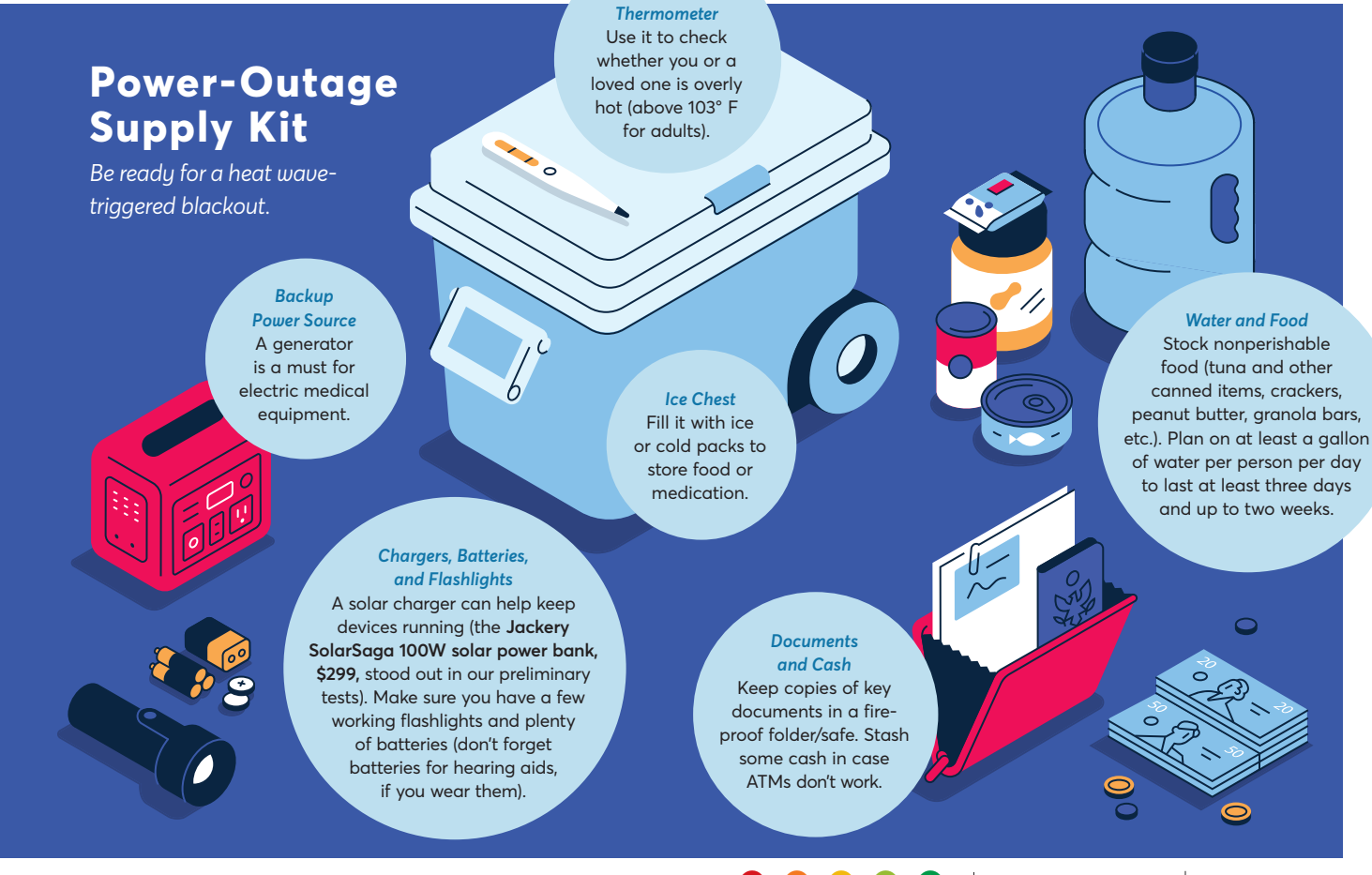
▶ **Invest in an air purifier.** High heat can diminish indoor air quality, increasing particulate pollution. An air purifier can significantly reduce such compounds. Also, know that a KF94 or KN95 mask may not be your best friend when air quality is poor. Says Marquez, "One way we regulate body temperature is by exhaling," meaning a heavy-duty mask may interfere with this heat-shedding mechanism. Wear a surgical mask instead.

▶ **Consider backup power.** A generator can keep your A/C and appliances running when the power is out (see CR's top picks, on the facing page). You may also want a battery- or solar-powered radio and charger.

▶ **Find cooling centers.** Many communities have set places where you can go to cool down. To find one, call your local office of emergency management or enter your ZIP code at 211.org. Or plan to head to a library, mall, or café.

Power-Outage Supply Kit

Be ready for a heat wave-triggered blackout.


Oral Thermometer
Use it to check whether you or a loved one is overly hot (above 103° F for adults).
Backup Power Source
A generator is a must for electric medical equipment.
Ice Chest
Fill it with ice or cold packs to store food or medication.
Water and Food
Stock nonperishable food (tuna and other canned items, crackers, peanut butter, granola bars, etc.). Plan on at least a gallon of water per person per day to last at least three days and up to two weeks.
Chargers, Batteries, and Flashlights
A solar charger can help keep devices running (the **Jackery SolarSaga 100W solar power bank, $299,** stood out in our preliminary tests). Make sure you have a few working flashlights and plenty of batteries (don't forget batteries for hearing aids, if you wear them).
Documents and Cash
Keep copies of key documents in a fire-proof folder/safe. Stash some cash in case ATMs don't work.

WORSE BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

DURING A HEAT WAVE

▶ **Keep your house as cool as you can.** Have the A/C running continuously (if you have it). Close curtains or put up reflective panels to reduce unwanted indoor heat gain. Even light-colored clothes hanging inside a window or cardboard covered with foil can deflect warming rays.

▶ **Use your oven, cooktop, and dryer less.** They can heat up your home (and you) even more.

▶ **Take cool baths or showers.** Running a damp cloth over your skin or misting yourself with cool water leads to evaporative cooling, but don't apply ice packs for long periods. Doing that can trigger shivering, which is how your body warms itself up.

▶ **During a brownout, unplug.** Minimize electrical usage by unplugging nonessential items (computers not in use, TVs), and use as little A/C as you can.

▶ **Make these moves during a power outage.** Stay on the lowest level of your home because heat rises. Keep the shades or curtains closed during the day to block the sun's warming rays; position battery-operated fans near cooler, shaded sides of your home. Keep your fridge and freezer shut as much as possible (the refrigerator will keep food cold for only about 4 hours; a full freezer will maintain its temperature for about 48 hours). If you need to refrigerate medications, keep a small cooler ready, to be filled with ice or cold packs, and a thermometer to monitor the temperature (keep it between 36° F and 40° F). If you have electric-powered medical devices, discuss backup power sources with your equipment supplier, power company, or police or fire department.

BEST GEAR FOR BEATING THE HEAT

These top picks from CR's tests can keep you and your home more comfortable when the temperature and humidity soar—and even when the power goes out.

WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS

For the most effective cooling, choose a unit with the right capacity for your space. Start by measuring, but also consider factors such as ceiling height and how shady or sunny the room is. See the buying guide at **CR.org/airconditioners** for details.

5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR.
✔ **LG LW6023IVSM** $380 *(shown)* — **90**

7,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR.
✔ **Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ085WD1** $530 — **89**

9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR.
$ **Midea MAW12V1QWT U-shaped** $500 — **89**

PORTABLE AIR CONDITIONERS

If you can't use window units (or your building doesn't allow them), a freestanding air conditioner might be your best option. They tend to be noisier than window models—even the best may disturb a light sleeper.

9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.
Midea MAP12S1TBL $575 *(shown)* — **74**

9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.
Whynter ARC-1230WN $670 — **72**

9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.
Frigidaire FHPW142AC1 $580 — **71**

PORTABLE GENERATORS

Less expensive than permanent standby generators, these models still have enough power to run a houseful of appliances. They run on gasoline, must be kept outside (20 feet from your house), and can be loud. To pick the right wattage for your needs, see **CR.org/generatorsize.**

7,000 TO 8,000 WATTS
✔ **Generac XT8500EFI** $1,200 *(shown)* — **75**

5,000 TO 6,900 WATTS
✔ **Briggs & Stratton 30728** $850 — **72**

2,500 TO 4,900 WATTS
$ **Wen GN5602X** $450 — **80**

INVERTER GENERATORS

These models run more quietly and efficiently—and produce fewer emissions—than other types of portable generators. They also typically cost more. Like portable models, inverter generators require gasoline as fuel and must be kept outside.

5,000-PLUS WATTS
$ **Pulsar PGDA70BISCO** $1,200 *(shown)* — **75**

2,500 TO 5,000 WATTS
$ **Champion 201049** $650 — **85**

1,500 TO 2,500 WATTS
$ **DeWalt DXGNI2200** $700 — **75**

DEHUMIDIFIERS

Although a dehumidifier will not cool your room, by removing moisture from the air it can make the space feel more comfortable (and a little cooler). Choose the right size for your space (for help, go to **CR.org/dehumidifiersize)** and know that they can be noisy.

LARGE-CAPACITY
$ **Honeywell TP70WKN** $300 *(shown)* — **83**

MEDIUM-CAPACITY
✔ **Midea MAD35S1QWT** $245 — **92**

SMALL-CAPACITY
✔ **Midea MAD20S1QWT** $200 — **87**

FREEZERS

One way CR's engineers test freezers is by checking their ability to stay cold after the power goes out. The two chest models listed here earned top power outage scores; uprights often show a faster temperature rise after power loss, but this one did well in our tests.

MIDSIZED CHEST FREEZER
$ **Insignia NS-CZ10WH6** $400 *(shown)* — **87**

SMALL CHEST FREEZER
✔ **Arctic King ARC050S0ARBB** $190 — **80**

LARGE UPRIGHT FREEZER
✔ **GE FUF21DLRWW** $950 — **84**

WALKING OUTSIDE

It's risky to be outside in high heat, and the situation gets even worse when it's humid: We cool ourselves by the evaporative powers of sweating, which can't happen efficiently when the air is full of moisture. According to the National Weather Service, a temperature of 90° F at 75 percent humidity will feel like 109° F on the heat index, an estimate of how hot it feels when air temperature and relative humidity are combined. ▼

PLAN AHEAD

▶ **Know when to stay home.** Pay attention to the heat index and the Air Quality Index. During a heat wave, avoid unnecessary activity, especially if you have factors (age, medical conditions) that could make you susceptible to heatstroke, says Marquez. If you do have to run errands, try to avoid being outdoors between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

▶ **Consider your wardrobe.** Lightweight, light-colored clothes in natural materials are best. Wear a wide-brim hat to shade your face and UV-blocking sunglasses.

▶ **Stock up on sunscreen.** For CR's top picks, see page 18.

DURING A HEAT WAVE

▶ **Pack plenty of water.** You'll want to drink about a cup every 90 minutes. Remember that thirst isn't the best indicator of when to drink—when you get thirsty, you're already dehydrated. Also, if you aren't urinating at least every 4 hours or you are feeling fatigue, thirst, or dizziness, drink more. If you are sweating, add electrolyte-based drinks (like sports drinks) to replenish lost salts, says Marquez. Skip caffeine and alcohol, which are diuretics that draw moisture from the body.

▶ **Be careful on hot pavement.** It can be hotter than the surrounding air, and a fall can lead to burns. Hot pavement may harm dogs' paws, so stay on grass or use protective booties (Wagwear WagWellies Mojave, $49, stood out in our recent tests).

▶ **Adapt your plans.** If it's much hotter out than you realized, head for shade or A/C. In a pinch, duck into a restroom and cool yourself with a damp paper towel on the back of your neck or on your forehead.

▶ **If you feel sick, take action.** Get to a cool place, loosen your clothes, and remove layers; take a cool bath or shower, or put cool, damp cloths on your body. Drink water or sports drinks. Get medical help if you experience confusion, dizziness, weakness, agitation, slurred speech, nausea, or vomiting.

Around-Town Supply Kit

Take these with you if you have to be outside on a hot day, and pack a few "just in case" items in your car for A/C issues and other breakdowns.

Hydration
Tote along water and an electrolyte powder or tablet you can mix in.
Cloth or Bandana—and a Personal Fan
Wet the cloth to cool yourself down—or use it to shield your steering wheel from the sun when you're out. A fan can help if the A/C isn't working.
hot stuff
Sunscreen and Hat
Keep extras in the car. You may have to walk to get help.

IN YOUR CAR

When the A/C is pumped to the max, your car can feel like a chilly oasis. But if something goes wrong, the interior temperature can climb to dangerous levels very quickly. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, temperatures can rise almost 20 degrees in the first 10 minutes, even with a window cracked. ▶

Phone and Charger
Charge your phone before you head out in case you need to call for a ride or for help. Or take a portable charger. The **BigBlue 3 Portable 28W Solar Charger, $69,** performed well in CR's early tests of solar chargers.
Snacks
It's smart to have a few nonperishable, non-melty snacks in your car if you're stuck for a while.
Flashlight
This is essential when driving at night.

STAY COOL(ER) ON VACATION

Last summer, many travel plans were derailed by the heat wave in Europe (where A/C isn't always a given) and the Canadian wildfires. This summer could be a repeat of that, and high heat can also affect public transportation—hello, frustrating delays! Follow this advice.

Before You Leave

PACK A FEW EXTRAS. Take a foldable wide-brim hat; a sports-drink powder; a handheld, battery-powered fan; and individually wrapped cooling wipes (available on Amazon).

CONSIDER BOOKING REFUNDABLE FLIGHTS. If you knew you were flying to Rome and it would be 107° F when you got there (as it was last summer), would you still want to go? Refundable tickets and hotels with flexible cancellation policies let you bow out without a big loss. Also check whether hotels have A/C; it's not always the norm.

GET THE RIGHT TRAVEL INSURANCE. A policy that covers medical care can be a lifesaver if you have a heat-related illness.

While You're Traveling

NO HOTEL A/C? Cool your face and wrists with water, and take cool showers or baths. Spend plenty of time in air-conditioned spaces.

CHARGE YOUR PHONE BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT. Take a charger with you and keep emergency numbers handy. You can also put your phone on power-saving mode and dim the screen to reduce battery use.

KNOW THAT FOOD SPOILS FASTER IN HEAT. The Department of Agriculture warns that food should not be left out for more than an hour in temperatures over 90° F. So think twice about what you eat, especially street-vendor temptations.

IF YOU FEEL SICK, SEEK SHADE AND HYDRATE. If someone has signs of heatstroke (lack of sweating, skin that's hot to the touch, dizziness, confusion or loss of consciousness), call 911 or the correct local number. Your hotel's front desk can likely help.

PLAN AHEAD

▶ **Check your car's condition.** Assess coolant levels: You can look under the hood (some autos have translucent reservoirs) or let your local shop check. Replacing the cabin filters, which can get packed with dirt and pollen, once or twice a year helps optimize airflow, says Michael Crossen, Consumer Reports' automotive technician. Also check your tire pressure and condition.

▶ **De-gunk the grill.** Remove leaves and debris, which could lead to your car overheating.

▶ **Service your battery.** Have the battery's charge, terminals, and mounting checked out at a dealer or repair shop, and see whether it's time for a replacement. You should also get your EV or hybrid battery evaluated before a long trip.

▶ **Shade your windows.** Use a reflective panel in your windshield when you park and add a shade to a panoramic sunroof (both available at Amazon and auto parts shops). Ask your dealership or detail shop about ceramic window tinting, a multilayered film infused with microscopic ceramic particles. It can block a high percentage of UV light to keep the interior cooler.

DURING A HEAT WAVE

▶ **Get the most from the A/C.** Don't waste time and gas trying to precool the car; start driving to get the compressor working efficiently. Open all the windows for 10 or 20 seconds to flush out the superheated air inside. Set the system to the lowest temperature, then adjust the fan setting for comfort.

▶ **Use the seat cooling function if your car has it.** It's a feature to look for if you're car-shopping in a high-heat area.

▶ **If your A/C breaks, open windows on opposite sides in the front and back seats.** This creates cross ventilation (but may not provide enough relief for a lengthy drive).

▶ **If your car breaks down or you have an accident, leave the vehicle.** The temperature will rise quickly (and another car could hit you). Seek shade while waiting for help.

Some Very Good News About Granola

This crunchy breakfast treat has long had a bad rep because of the fat, sugar, and calories it contains. But our new tests reveal some great-tasting and better-for-you finds.

BY ALTHEA CHANG-COOK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

GRANOLA DOESN'T USUALLY SEEM LIKE A HEALTHY CHOICE. Check the nutrition label and you may see as many as 200-plus calories in a tiny ⅓-cup serving–along with lots of added sugars and saturated fat. So it's not a surprise that a March 2024 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,000 American adults found that 59 percent hadn't eaten granola recently.

"But the basic ingredients–oats, nuts, seeds, dried fruit–are whole foods that offer health benefits," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist who oversaw our evaluation of 22 granolas. While the testing confirmed that a few of them resemble a dessert more than a breakfast cereal, we also found better options. "Some of the granolas we tested are really flavorful but still relatively low in added sugars and saturated fat."

Checking ingredients lists and sticking with moderate portions is, of course, key. Our ratings (starting on page 42) can help guide you further.

The Good Stuff in Granola

Like a number of cold cereals in the supermarket, granola contains whole grains–typically oats. But the rolled oats in granola are in a less processed form than the whole grains you might find in, say, wheat flakes or oat squares.

"Most cold cereals, even those with whole grains, are made from grains that are cooked and pressed or extruded into flakes or other shapes," Keating says. "Some can be a healthy choice, but they are more processed than the rolled oats in many granolas."

Rolled oats are digested more slowly, which can help prevent blood sugar swings. Oats also contain beta-glucan, a type of fiber that's been shown to help lower cholesterol. A 2016 analysis of studies found that consuming the amount of beta-glucan in about 1 cup of dry oats per day reduced LDL ("bad") cholesterol by about 4 percent.

In addition, the fiber in oats helps control appetite. And oats supply iron, magnesium, and potassium, as well as antioxidants, which help fight cell damage that can trigger disease.

Granola also may contain nuts, nut butters, and seeds, and is typically made with oil as well–all ingredients that can bump up the fat content. But nuts and seeds have primarily healthy unsaturated fats, as do many vegetable oils used in granola, such as canola, olive, and sunflower.

"Eating these fats in small amounts will not make you fat but will instead be beneficial," says Dana Ellis Hunnes, PhD, senior clinical dietitian at the UCLA Medical Center. For example, people who got the most healthy fats in their diets were 11 to 19 percent less likely to die prematurely than those who got the least, according to a 2016 study of more than 125,000 men and women published in JAMA Internal Medicine.

All of this makes granolas with healthy fats your best option. "I don't think people should be afraid to eat those types of granolas," Hunnes says.

As for the raisins and other dried fruit you may find in granola, they can be a big source of calories but they have all the fiber of fresh fruit and similar amounts of vitamins and minerals. "Including them is a healthy way to sweeten granola, provided the dried fruit itself isn't sweetened with sugar," Keating says.

The Best & Worst Granolas

The granolas we rated are grouped by flavor and ranked in order of nutrition and taste. Those with the same scores are listed alphabetically. Recommended granolas have no more than 4 grams of saturated fat and no more than 5 grams of added sugars, and represent the best combination of nutrition and taste.

Note: Nutrition values are for a ⅓-cup serving. For manufacturers that list a different serving size, we used their products' nutrition facts panel to calculate the nutrition values for a ⅓-cup serving.

TRADITIONAL FLAVOR

Early Bird Farmhand's Choice Granola
12 oz.; $13.50

The tastiest granola we tried, this has a good sweet-salty balance. It contains nicely toasted oats, toasted coconut, sunflower seeds, pepitas, and pecans.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **2 g**
CARBS **15 g** | FIBER **1.5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **100 mg**

NUTRITION ▲ TASTE ▲▲

Back Roads Original Granola
10 oz.; $10

This blend of lightly toasted oats, large raisins, cashew pieces, whole almonds, toasted coconut, and seeds is sweet but slightly dry.

CALORIES **200** | SAT. FAT **4 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **3 g**
PROTEIN **5 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION ▲ TASTE ▲

365 Whole Foods Market Organic Fruit & Nut Granola
17 oz.; $6

The oats in this are unevenly toasted, and the cranberries and raisins are slightly dry. On the plus side, its fruit and nuts are flavorful and it's not too sweet.

CALORIES **180** | SAT. FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **25 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION ! TASTE ▲

Purely Elizabeth Original Ancient Grain Granola
12 oz.; $7

Coconut sugar gives this sweet and salty granola a rich, deep flavor. It's chunky, with clusters of toasted oats and other grains plus chia and sunflower seeds.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **3.5 g**
CARBS **19 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **130 mg**

NUTRITION ! TASTE ▲

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

How We Rated Granola

In our tests of traditional, berry, and vanilla granolas, we defined them as "good for you" if they had 5 grams or less of added sugars (equivalent to 1¼ teaspoons of sugar) and 4 grams or less of saturated fat (20 percent of the daily value) per ⅓-cup serving. These two values account for a majority of our nutrition score.

When you're shopping, it can be tough to compare the calories (and nutrients) between granolas because serving sizes listed on the packages can vary from ¼ to ⅔ cup. In our tests, we standardized the serving at ⅓ cup of granola to make the differences in nutrition content easier to spot.

To calculate the taste score, our experts evaluated each product's flavor and texture without milk. None of our testers knew which granolas they were tasting. Five—two traditional flavor, one berry, and two vanilla—scored high enough on nutrition and taste to be recommended. Several others that got top marks for taste just missed our guidelines for healthiness.

What to Watch Out For

CALORIES. "Even though the oats, nuts, and fruit in granola are good for you on their own, combining them makes for a pretty calorically dense snack or cereal," Keating says. For instance, Bob's Red Mill Homestyle Cranberry Almond Granola has 185 calories in ⅓ cup. Raisin Bran, a less dense whole-grain cereal, has 63 calories in ⅓ cup. "A third of a cup of granola is going to look tiny in a cereal bowl, so you may be tempted to pour in more," Keating says. "That's why using it as a topping on fruit or yogurt instead is a good idea."

ADDED SUGARS. The American Heart Association recommends that women get no more than 6 teaspoons (25 grams) of added sugars per day and men no more than 9 teaspoons (36 grams). A serving of a sugary granola can account for a lot of that. Five granolas we tested had 2 teaspoons (8 grams) or more of added sugars in ⅓ cup. Many had coconut sugar, honey, or maple syrup, which aren't any better for you than regular sugar.

Fortunately, our panel of trained testers found you don't need much of the sweet stuff to get a great-tasting granola. The one with the highest taste score—Early Bird Farmhand's Choice

Michele's Granola Original
12 oz.; $8.50

Clusters of lightly toasted oats, sunflower seeds, and almonds in this granola are both crispy and tender.

CALORIES **185** | SAT. FAT **2.5 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION: I | TASTE: ^

Nature's Path Organic Maple Almond Grain Free Granola
8 oz.; $7.50

The coating on this granola tastes like a blend of maple syrup, coconut sugar, and cinnamon, and it nearly overwhelms the flavor of the nuts and seeds.

CALORIES **170** | SAT. FAT **5 g**
CARBS **8 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **3 g**
PROTEIN **6 g**
SODIUM **60 mg**

NUTRITION: I | TASTE: I

Nature's Path Organic Honey Almond Granola
11 oz.; $6

In some samples the oats were lightly toasted and in others they were very dark. The cereal also tasted stale and a bit like cardboard.

CALORIES **140** | SAT. FAT **0.5 g**
CARBS **21 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **65 mg**

NUTRITION: I | TASTE: v

Nature Valley Oats & Honey Crunchy Granola
16 oz.; $6

A chunky granola, this looks like broken-up granola bars. It's sweet, with brown sugar, honey, and toasted oat flavors.

CALORIES **160** | SAT. FAT **0.5 g**
CARBS **25 g** | FIBER **1.5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **125 mg**

NUTRITION: v | TASTE: ^

BERRY FLAVOR

Cascadian Farm Organic No Added Sugar Blueberry Vanilla Granola
11 oz.; $5

Date powder gives this no-sugar-added option a little sweetness. The texture is unusual—more cookielike than crunchy.

CALORIES **165** | SAT. FAT **2 g**
CARBS **22 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **45 mg**

NUTRITION: ^ | TASTE: ^

Kind Vanilla Blueberry Granola With Flax Seeds
11 oz.; $5.50

A combo of oats, rice puffs, flax, and dried blueberries, this is crunchy and nicely sweet. It has added fiber, which may not have the benefits of fiber in food.

CALORIES **110** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **20 mg**

NUTRITION: I | TASTE: ^

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Granola—has 5 grams of added sugars. Some of our recommended products have even less. For example, Cascadian Farm Organic No Added Sugar Blueberry Vanilla Granola has, as its name says, no added sugar at all, and Back Roads Original Granola has just 3 grams per serving.

SATURATED FAT. The fats in many granolas are healthy, but the granolas with a lot of coconut oil or coconut can be high in unhealthy saturated fat. For example, Paleonola Grain Free Cinnamon Blueberry Granola has 10.5 grams in ⅓ cup.

Coconut oil is often touted as healthier, but the evidence is thin. "If someone has high cholesterol, it would be good to be careful about coconut because of its saturated fat," says Kelly Morrow, RDN, an affiliate instructor at the Osher Center for Integrative Health Department of Family Medicine at the University of Washington. A case in point: A 2020 review article published in the journal Circulation found that compared with oils rich in healthy fats, coconut oil increased LDL cholesterol by more than 10 points, on average.

UNWANTED ADDITIVES. Some companies bump up the fiber content of their granolas with ingredients like chicory root. But it's unclear if such added fiber has the same benefits as fiber from whole food. You may also see no-calorie sweeteners like stevia or monk fruit, especially in low-sugar granolas. Research has raised concerns about the health effects of sugar alternatives, so consider limiting consumption.

GRAIN-FREE GRANOLA. Those with nuts, nut butter, seeds, and often coconut—but no oats or other grains—are increasingly popular, especially among people who follow low-carb diets. That doesn't always make them the best choice. While some ingredients are rich in healthy fats, the grain-free granolas we tested were among the highest in saturated fat due to coconut oil or coconut. "And there's no reason to avoid granola with whole grains," Keating says. "It's well established that whole grains help protect against heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses." But if you want a grain-free option, Purely Elizabeth Grain Free Vanilla Almond Butter Granola meets our saturated fat (and added sugar) guidelines and is one of our top picks.

BERRY FLAVOR continued

Seven Sundays Rise & Shine Strawberry Banana Nut Granola

20 oz.; $16.50

This is a crunchy, chewy, grain-free mix of sliced almonds, pepitas, coconut, sunflower and chia seeds, and flaxseeds. Dried fruit and date syrup supply the sweetness.

CALORIES **170** | SAT. FAT **5 g**
CARBS **9 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **5 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION: ! TASTE: ^

Aurora Natural Cranberry Vanilla Crunch Granola

14 oz.; $6

Oats and mini rice puffs create a super-crunchy cereal. It's also quite sweet with large cranberries, honey, and a hint of vanilla.

CALORIES **160** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **31 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **11 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **25 mg**

NUTRITION: v TASTE: ^

Bob's Red Mill Homestyle Cranberry Almond Granola

11 oz.; $6

The plentiful oat clusters, with pepitas, whole almonds, cashew pieces, and dried cranberries, make a crunchy mix. It's sweet with a hint of salt.

CALORIES **185** | SAT. FAT **4 g**
CARBS **25 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **85 mg**

NUTRITION: v TASTE: ^

Paleonola Grain Free Cinnamon Blueberry Granola

10 oz.; $11

This slightly crunchy blend of sliced almonds, pecan bits, large coconut flakes, and large freeze-dried blueberries has a somewhat over-powering dose of cinnamon.

CALORIES **210** | SAT. FAT **10.5 g**
CARBS **12 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **3 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION: v TASTE: !

VANILLA FLAVOR

✓ Bear Naked Vanilla Almond Crisp Granola

12 oz.; $5

Toasty and crunchy, this granola is mostly loose oats with a few clusters. It also has sliced almonds, flaxseeds, and tiny rice crisps, and vanilla and flaxseed flavor.

CALORIES **145** | SAT. FAT **0.5 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **105 mg**

NUTRITION: ^ TASTE: ^

✓ Purely Elizabeth Grain Free Vanilla Almond Butter Granola

8 oz.; $7.50

Pumpkin and sunflower seeds, cashews, and coconut flakes are coated in almond butter with vanilla and cinnamon flavor. The texture is both crisp and tender.

CALORIES **170** | SAT. FAT **4 g**
CARBS **10 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **6 g**
SODIUM **105 mg**

NUTRITION: ^ TASTE: ^

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

What About Granola Bars?

Granola in bar form can be a handy preportioned snack, but it can also be a sugar-filled one. We reviewed the nutrition stats for a dozen granola and oat bars and found just a few that met our suggested limit for added sugars, which is no more than 5 grams per serving. Nature Valley Oats 'n Honey Crunchy Granola Bars, for instance, had more than double that amount. Calorie-wise, the bars we looked at ranged from 130 to 210 per serving, similar to a serving of granola. And for some, a serving was just half a bar. Eat an entire Bobo's Original Oat Bar, for instance, and you'll get 18 grams of added sugars and 340 calories.

If you like the convenience of bars, we suggest MadeGood Mixed Berry Granola Bar or Cascadian Farm Blueberry Vanilla Chewy Bar, No Added Sugar, which meet our sugar guidelines.

HEALTHIER OPTIONS

MadeGood Mixed Berry Granola Bar

SERVING SIZE **1 bar, 0.8 oz.**
CALORIES **100**
SAT. FAT **0 g**
FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**

Cascadian Farm Blueberry Vanilla Chewy Bar, No Added Sugar

SERVING SIZE **1 bar, 1.2 oz.**
CALORIES **140**
SAT. FAT **0.5 g**
FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**

SUGAR OVERLOAD

Bobo's Original Oat Bar

SERVING SIZE **½ bar, 1.5 oz.**
CALORIES **170**
SAT. FAT **4 g**
FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**

Nature Valley Oats 'n Honey Crunchy Granola Bar

SERVING SIZE **2 bars, 1.5 oz.**
CALORIES **190**
SAT. FAT **1 g**
FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **11 g**

Jessica's Natural Foods Vanilla Maple Granola

11 oz.; $7.50

Cinnamon, honey, maple syrup, and vanilla give this granola a nice blend of flavors. The texture is slightly crunchy.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **17 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **30 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: ^

Trader Joe's Just The Clusters Vanilla Almond Granola

16 oz.; $3.80

Here's a granola with clusters of ground oats and rice puffs. It also has large pieces of sliced almonds and offers a nice balance of sweetness and vanilla flavor.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **21 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **35 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: ^

Back to Nature Vanilla Almond Agave Granola

11 oz.; $6

If you like super-crunchy granola, this one is for you. It has small clusters of oats, rice puffs, and almonds. The flavor of toasted oats dominates.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **21 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **10 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: 1

Good & Gather (Target) French Vanilla Almond Granola

12 oz.; $4.50

This one tastes a bit like a sugar cookie. Oats, rice puffs, and small almond pieces make up the lightly toasted clusters.

CALORIES **140** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **8 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **40 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: 1

Great Value (Walmart) French Vanilla Almond Granola

11 oz.; $2.70

While this has a decent level of sweetness, the lightly toasted granola tastes almost raw, with a slightly dry, chalky texture.

CALORIES **145** | SAT. FAT **0 g**
CARBS **25 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **8 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: 1

Nature Valley Vanilla Almond Reduced Sugar Granola

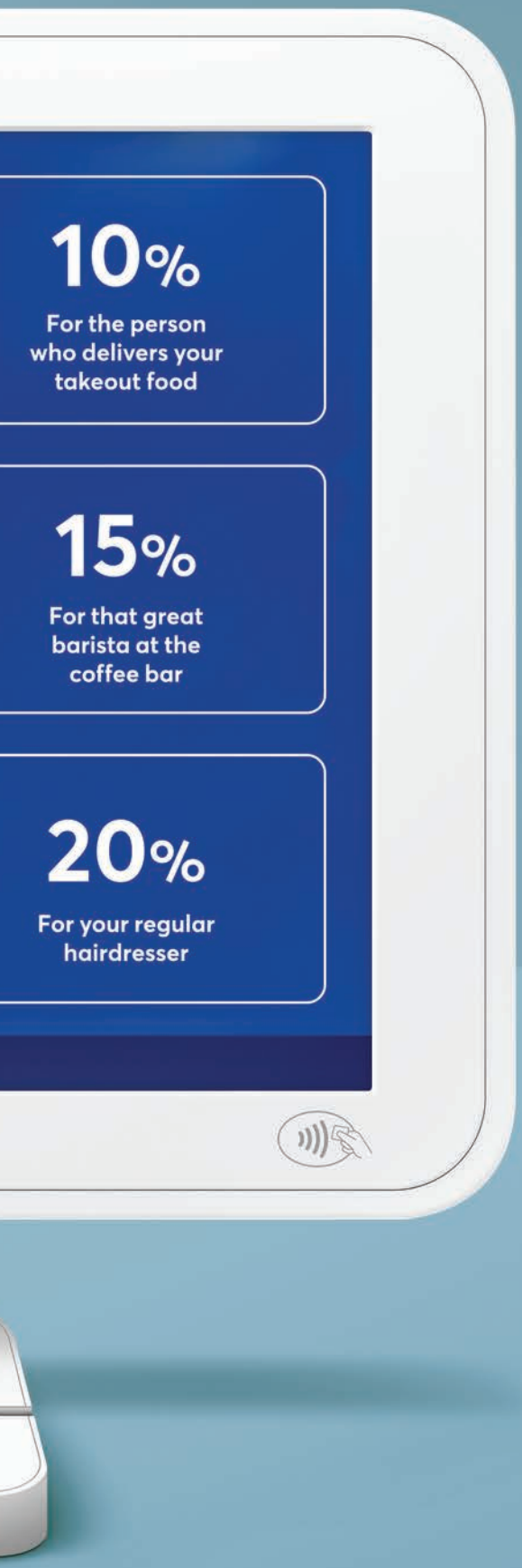
11 oz.; $5.50

A mildly sweet granola, it has plenty of almonds. But the oats are chalky and dry, and they taste slightly raw. And its added fiber may not be as good for you as natural fiber.

CALORIES **130** | SAT. FAT **0.5 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **3.5 g**
PROTEIN **3.5 g**
SODIUM **75 mg**

NUTRITION: 1 | TASTE: 1

Do You Really Need to Tip Them?
OUR ULTIMATE GUIDE
Fast-food counters. Coffee spots. Even convenience stores. It seems like you're being asked for gratuities everywhere. Here's when you don't have to pay, when you might want to, and how much.
BY JESSE WILL



PERHAPS YOU'VE STUMBLED INTO THIS SCENARIO: At an airport, scrambling to buy a snack and a bottle of water before a flight, you find the checkout kiosk and tap your card. The machine asks if you'd like to add a tip. But … for whom? The employee in the corner hanging bags of Cheez-Its?

Or maybe you've had this experience: You're at a trendy restaurant where you go to a counter to order food that will be brought to your table—after you collect your own silverware. When you're asked to pay, the counter person spins a screen to reveal tip increments of 20, 25, and 30 percent … for service on food and drinks you haven't even received yet.

Welcome to the new normal in tipping: being put on the spot to leave a gratuity in situations you never used to be. It can be confusing and frustrating—not to mention guilt-inducing—especially if there are prying eyes behind you in line watching what you select on the screen.

And we're not only being asked to tip more often. There's also what's known as "tipflation"—where we're being asked to tip in higher amounts. A recent nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,027 U.S. adults found that 64 percent said they were being asked to tip "much" or "somewhat" more often than they were five years ago. And over half said they felt they'd been pressured to leave a bigger tip than they wanted to.

"Tipping is broken," says Harlan Scott, a hospitality consultant and restaurateur in Austin, Texas. "You often don't know if you're tipping to give an employee making twenty dollars an hour a little bonus or if you need to tip to subsidize someone being paid a minimum wage." Also unclear: Whether the person you're tipping gets traditional benefits through their employer. "It's a tremendous amount of pressure on the consumer."

Tipping expert Mike Lynn, PhD, of Cornell University—a professor of consumer behavior and marketing who has published more than 80 academic papers on tipping—points to a "perfect storm" behind the recent shift in tipping culture, based on three forces. First, technology facilitated the process in the early 2010s, allowing businesses to use tablet-based point-of-sale systems that request tips with the tap of a screen, reducing the awkwardness that can be associated with asking for one.

Then came COVID-19. "During the pandemic, people started tipping larger amounts and for services they didn't usually tip for," Lynn says. "When businesses noticed that, it gave them permission to start asking for tipping in new contexts, and to start asking for larger amounts."

Third, the current close-to-full employment market—coupled with inflation—has made tipping an attractive option for businesses. It's a way to boost employee earnings without directly increasing prices or wages.

But that doesn't mean you should feel guilted into providing a different tip amount than you mean to, whether it's for a cup of coffee or an afternoon at the salon. "It's true that we're tipping more than ever, but we need to be a little bit more selective about how much we're tipping and why," says Jacqueline Whitmore, an etiquette expert in Florida and founder of the Protocol School of Palm Beach.

We consulted Whitmore and other experts to navigate real-life situations and offer clear solutions for making quick, informed decisions, empowering you to tip—or not—with confidence.

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC HEINTZ

Dining-Out Etiquette

Signing a restaurant bill isn't straightforward anymore. A tip of 15 to 20 percent or higher (before tax) for exceptional service is still standard. But what if you bus your own table?

You've been added even though you've already been charged a gratuity.

SCENARIO: The bill for your group dinner includes a 20 percent auto-gratuity. Yet on the receipt there's a handwritten "thanks" from your server and a line for an additional tip. Isn't the auto-tip enough?
THE MOVE: Unless your service was truly exceptional, leave it as is. "You are not obligated to tip extra," Whitmore says.

You get partial service.

SCENARIO: At a casual eatery, you order at a counter but are served at a table. The payment screen asks for a tip at the time of ordering. How much for this half-self, half-served experience?
THE MOVE: Consider tipping a midrange amount—perhaps 10 percent—that reflects the hybrid nature of the service experience.

You're asked for a tip when picking up fast food.

SCENARIO: You're collecting your order at the counter when a staff member spins the screen, suggesting a 20 percent tip for handing over your pizzas and salad.
THE MOVE: When minimal service is involved, consider a few bucks or none at all. "You won't be alone. Recent surveys have shown that around 40 percent of consumers tip for a food pickup," Lynn says. "That's not a majority. You don't have to submit to pressure as much as you think."

You're ordering with a QR code.

SCENARIO: At a new restaurant, you order and pay with a QR code instead of dealing with a waiter—but are then asked for a tip.
THE MOVE: As with counter service, make a judgment call and tip only for the actual service level you receive. (Is the food delivered to you? Did you have to set up and clear your own table?) "You might want to give the waiter something, but it's not going to be 20 percent of the entire bill," says Diane Gottsman, an etiquette expert. "It's more of what you feel is appropriate."

You're asked to pay a tip on top of a service charge.

SCENARIO: Your meal concludes and the bill lists a service charge. There's also a line to add a tip. Isn't a service charge the same thing as a tip?
THE MOVE: Ask your server to clarify what the service charge is for. "Service charges aren't one-size-fits-all," Gottsman says. Some may be to offset the expense of operating a restaurant. But "some may go to the server. Since it involves their livelihood, most will be happy to tell you the details."

You wonder if a dollar tip is enough for a cocktail.

SCENARIO: At an upscale bar, specialty cocktails are priced at $16, leaving you questioning the old dollar-per-drink rule.
THE MOVE: Consider the craftsmanship involved. (Did the bartender just spear a bunch of fruit and shake up the drink for a minute?) Adjust your tip to up to 20 percent of your bill depending on the bartender's skill and effort. But the dollar-per-drink rule generally holds if you're having, say, a glass of wine or a beer.

Food Deliveries

Delivery apps make getting food easy, but figuring out tips? That's the tricky part.

You can't tell if the delivery fee is the same as a tip.

SCENARIO: You're shopping online for groceries or takeout and see a delivery fee at checkout. You wonder if it includes a tip.
THE MOVE: Delivery and service fees usually aren't treated as tips for the driver. "Always check the website or app," says Gottsman, who adds that a tip of 15 to 20 percent of the total bill, or a minimum of $5 if it's a small order, is usually appropriate.

You prepaid the tip.

SCENARIO: You've already

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOMENIC BAHMANN

added a tip during the checkout process on a delivery app. When your food arrives, does this mean that no extra cash handoff is needed at the door?
THE MOVE: If you've tipped through the app, you're all set. These amounts go directly to your delivery person, so no need to fumble for cash at the door. If you tipped through the app but still want to make sure the gratuity truly goes to the driver, check the app's FAQs or ask when the delivery person arrives. Most delivery apps are transparent about their policies.

In-Home Services

Deciding whether to give a gratuity for a home service—from a sofa delivery to a stove fix—can be a head-scratching experience. When should you grease a palm and when will a simple thanks do?

They're setting up a new sofa.

SCENARIO: After paying a hefty delivery fee for your new sofa, you wonder if tipping the delivery team is expected or necessary.
THE MOVE: Even with substantial delivery fees, acknowledging the physical effort of a delivery team with a small tip of $5 to $10 per person is a kind gesture. "The more stairs, the higher the tip," suggests Jodi RR Smith, an etiquette consultant.

Your building handyman unclogs your drain.

SCENARIO: When someone on the maintenance staff of your building or homeowners association comes to fix a toilet or tighten a hinge, should you hand over a little extra?
THE MOVE: In general, you should be tipping maintenance employees you regularly deal with at the end of the year. But when the service goes above and beyond, a tip on the spot can express your gratitude more personally. "Especially if it's in the middle of the night or on a major holiday," Smith says.

The repair is pricey.

SCENARIO: A technician charges $400 for an essential repair. Given the high cost, do you still need to tip?
THE MOVE: "Generally, skilled technicians and tradespeople like plumbers are not tipped, but it's situational," Smith says. If the person went above and beyond, was professional, and solved a significant problem, a tip of $10 to $20 might be a way to say thank you, though it's not obligatory, given the high initial cost, she says.

Self-Care

At a salon or medi-spa, the only thing more complex than choosing the right kind of facial is figuring out the tipping protocol. Who knew relaxation could be so stressful?

You're getting your hair cut by the owner.

SCENARIO: After a satisfying haircut at the salon, you wonder whether to tip the stylist, who happens to be the owner.
THE MOVE: "Etiquette has evolved here," Smith says. She advises tipping your stylist every time you visit even if they're the owner. Fifteen to 20 percent is still the standard, according to Gottsman.

Your derm performs a skin check.

SCENARIO: You're at a dermatologist's office that also offers cosmetic treatments, but you're there to get a spot on your skin evaluated. When you're leaving, a tipping option appears on the payment screen, leaving you uncertain.
THE MOVE: It's generally accepted that you don't tip a dermatologist—just as you wouldn't tip any other doctor, or an attorney.

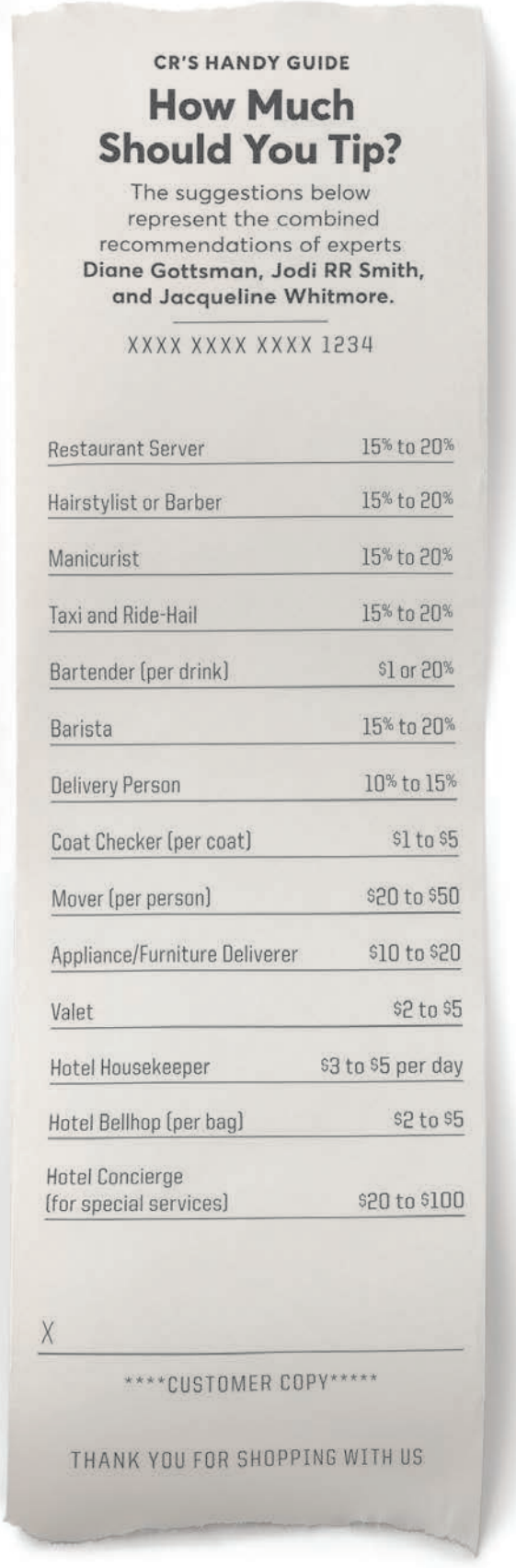

CR'S HANDY GUIDE
How Much Should You Tip?
The suggestions below represent the combined recommendations of experts Diane Gottsman, Jodi RR Smith, and Jacqueline Whitmore.
XXXX XXXX XXXX 1234
Restaurant Server 15% to 20%
Hairstylist or Barber 15% to 20%
Manicurist 15% to 20%
Taxi and Ride-Hail 15% to 20%
Bartender (per drink) $1 or 20%
Barista 15% to 20%
Delivery Person 10% to 15%
Coat Checker (per coat) $1 to $5
Mover (per person) $20 to $50
Appliance/Furniture Deliverer $10 to $20
Valet $2 to $5
Hotel Housekeeper $3 to $5 per day
Hotel Bellhop (per bag) $2 to $5
Hotel Concierge (for special services) $20 to $100
X
****CUSTOMER COPY*****
THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING WITH US

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Hired Cars

Ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft have brought new tipping twists to figure out.

You don't know whether to tip the Uber driver.

SCENARIO: At the end of a trip, an app prompts you for a tip. But you remember a time when tipping wasn't an option, and you're unsure about the current expectations.

THE MOVE: You're right. Uber, for instance, didn't allow tipping until 2017. But today, tipping 15 percent as a baseline—with room to increase for exceptional service—is appropriate. "It's crucial to remember that ride-share drivers often don't have the benefits that come with traditional employment," Smith says.

You're taking a taxi, not an Uber.

SCENARIO: You've just arrived at your destination via a taxi you hailed on the street. But have new practices influenced tipping norms for cabs?

THE MOVE: "The standard for tipping cab drivers remains at about 15 percent," Smith advises. If the tip screen you see starts with higher options, feel free to enter a custom amount. But "consider more if it's a very short trip or it's raining, or if they've taken you a long way to a place where they're unlikely to pick up another fare."

Hotels and Travel

What's the right way to tip someone who works behind the scenes? And what if you forget cash at the valet stand?

You're traveling with your messy family.

SCENARIO: You're getting ready to check out of your hotel and you think about the housekeeping staff cleaning up after you and your two young kids. Should you leave a bigger tip for the extra mess?

THE MOVE: Yes. "Start with $3 to $5 per day, and with each extra guest add $1 per person to cover the additional effort," Whitmore says. "Tip daily instead of at the end, since housekeeping staff may change."

You're paying for room service.

SCENARIO: You're signing for your room-service meal, noticing the menu mentioned that gratuity was included, yet there's still a line for an extra tip. Now you're puzzled.

THE MOVE: "Always start by reviewing your bill to confirm that the gratuity was included" as the menu indicated it would be, Gottsman says. "If not, a tip of 15 to 20 percent of the bill is appropriate. You don't need to tip again for tray pickup."

Your concierge gives you easy directions.

SCENARIO: After asking the hotel concierge for directions to the best nearby coffee shop, you wonder if this simple request merits a tip.

THE MOVE: "For quick directions to the nearest coffee shop, no tip is required," Gottsman says. "But for services like snagging theater tickets or dinner reservations, tip $5 to $10. For helping you snag hard-to-get tickets or bookings, $20 or more is appropriate.

You're not sure what to tip the luggage attendant.

SCENARIO: They help with your suitcases, and you have a couple. You're wondering how much to tip for this brief yet helpful service.

THE MOVE: Typically, the tip is $1 to $2 per bag. But if you have just one or two, a $5 tip might be more appropriate. A rule that Gottsman follows is "if they touch it"—meaning bags, extra pillows, etc.—take that as a sign that it's a good time to tip.

You're out of cash.

SCENARIO: You're at the valet stand, ready to drive off, when you realize your wallet's empty of the standard tip ($2 to $5). Do you ask the person who just retrieved your car if they would accept Venmo or another type of mobile payment in place of a cash tip?

THE MOVE: Sure. The digital era has made this question more acceptable. "I would strongly encourage it," Smith says.

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Hyundai Santa Fe

We just bought the Santa Fe, a midsized three-row SUV. The cockpit has a big screen dominating the dash (on high trim levels) and good storage, including a center cubby hinged so that it opens from front or back. Engine choices include a 277-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder or a 231-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged hybrid.

CR'S TAKE Easy access and a comfortable driving position are high points. The engine on each model is peppy, and the ride and handling are decent.

BASE PRICE RANGE $33,950-$48,800
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,395
PRICE AS DRIVEN $40,465

PHOTO: HYUNDAI

ASK OUR EXPERTS

How can I rid my car of bad odors?

Foul smells in a car can come from mold, pets, and sweaty sports gear, among other things. The key is to **identify the source.** Remove all trash. Check for leaks, including around the sunroof. If the smell is coming from the vents, get an **A/C disinfectant** from an auto parts store. Spray it into the outside vent in front of the windshield with the cabin air filter removed, run the cabin fan, then install a new filter. Carpet and upholstery may need a **deep cleaning.** Use only car-specific cleaners, and leave the windows down to allow the interior to fully dry.

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

What to Do About Too-Bright Oncoming Headlights

Glare from oncoming cars or the vehicle behind you can be a major annoyance when driving at night. It can be caused by drivers who leave on their high beams, vehicles that are taller than yours, or cars with misaligned or overly bright aftermarket lights. But there is something you can do, says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "Look away from the headlights and down toward the right side of the lane until the brighter lights pass," she says. In addition, put your rearview mirror in "night" mode to reflect less glare, usually by using a lever at the bottom of the mirror. Some rearview and side mirrors dim automatically.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

$12,182

The average annual cost of owning and operating a new vehicle in 2023, including car payment, fuel, and insurance. The sharp increase from 2022, when the cost was $10,728, was driven by record-high vehicle prices and finance rates.

Source: AAA.

RECALL

Jeep

More than 338,000 2021-2023 Jeep Grand Cherokee L and 2022-2023 Grand Cherokee SUVs are being recalled due to a manufacturing problem affecting bolts in a suspension component. If the bolts break, a wheel could come loose from the vehicle. Jeep warns that prior to failure, drivers may hear unusual noises when driving over bumps.

WHAT TO DO Jeep dealerships will inspect and, if necessary, replace the improperly installed bolts, free of charge, or may reimburse you if you already paid to have this problem fixed. For more information, call the automaker at 800-853-1403.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

MONEY-SAVER SPECIAL

Should You Lease Your Next Car?

Read on to find out whether buying or leasing is the better deal for you.

by Keith Barry

SHOPPING FOR A NEW CAR means deciding between buying and leasing. In general, you'll have a lower monthly payment if you lease, but you'll pay less in the long run if you finance your new car—and you'll save even more if you pay for the whole thing in cash.

But the decision isn't all about cost. Buying and leasing offer unique benefits and drawbacks depending on your lifestyle and preferences. Would you enjoy getting a new car every three years for a predictable monthly payment without worrying about out-of-warranty repairs or the hassle of selling or trading it in? If so, you probably should consider leasing rather than buying. But if you plan to keep your car for a long time or expect to put a lot of miles on it, you'll probably be better off buying.

With that in mind, we've got real-world examples of lease deals offered by automakers and exclusive Consumer Reports survey data to help you decide whether leasing or buying makes more sense for you this year.

A Changing Landscape

It might seem as though there's no such thing as a good deal on a new car anymore. With high prices and interest rates, both leasing and financing cost more than ever. The average monthly lease payment at the end of 2023 was $606 and the average monthly loan payment was $738—both more than 30 percent higher than they were at the end of 2019, according to Experian Automotive, a data analytics company.

But that may be changing soon. After years of shortages, "inventories have gone up," according to Tom Libby, an industry analyst at the consulting firm S&P Global Mobility. As a result, automakers are once

BUYING VS. LEASING

WHICH ONE COSTS MORE?

You should consider interest rates, how long you plan to keep the car, and the length of the car loan.

This chart compares costs for buying and leasing a Honda CR-V SUV, including estimated resale value after three years, assuming you put the same amount of money down at the start. In this example, Honda discounted the vehicle cost by $3,331 for lessees and cut the interest rate to 2.9 percent for buyers with excellent credit—typical of current incentives and terms. Note that lease deals might not apply to all trim levels and options.

2024
HONDA
CR-V AWD LX
$32,350 MSRP

BUY 36-MONTH LOAN AT 2.9% APR

$4,199 DOWN PAYMENT + $817 PER MONTH X 36 MONTHS = $33,611 TOTAL DOWN + MONTHLY PAYMENTS - $23,000 FUTURE RESALE VALUE = $10,611 YOUR TOTAL COST

LEASE 36-MONTH LEASE

$4,199 DUE AT SIGNING + $319 PER MONTH X 36 MONTHS = $15,683 TOTAL SIGNING + MONTHLY PAYMENTS - $0 FUTURE RESALE VALUE = $15,683 YOUR TOTAL COST

again starting to offer incentives to attract buyers.

Those in the market to buy a car may encounter temptingly low promotional financing rates offered by automakers, and those who want to lease may see discounts that lower their monthly payments. The potential for savings increases even more if you're considering an electric or plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV). These are eligible for different federal tax credits and incentives depending on whether they're purchased or leased.

When You Should Lease

Leasing can offer clear advantages over buying in the following situations:

▶**You don't want to deal with surprise repairs or typical maintenance costs.** "Leases are rarely longer than the term of a manufacturer warranty, and many leases also offer free maintenance for at least the first two years," says John Ibbotson, CR's manager of auto testing. As a result, your cost of ownership is very predictable.

▶**You're interested in a luxury car.** Automakers often discount the cost of leasing a luxury car to attract new buyers to a brand. It can bring the monthly payment in line with what it would cost to finance a less-pricey vehicle, Libby says. But be aware that specific options and trims aren't always available on a discounted lease deal.

▶**You want a car with the latest features.** "New cars often have the latest safety equipment and better crash protection than older models," says Jennifer Stockburger, operations manager at CR's Auto Test Center. "If you go from lease to lease, you'll always have a late-model car with the most current safety features."

When You Should Buy

In the situations that follow, buying–either financing or purchasing a vehicle outright–makes more sense.

▶**You drive a lot or put a lot of wear and tear on your car.** Most leases cap how many miles you can drive–usually 10,000 to 15,000 per year–and will charge you 10 to 30 cents for every mile you go over your limit. For many people, that's not enough mileage. Leased cars also have to be returned in good condition as part of the contract, so if you have a messy pet or tend to attract dings and dents, you're better off buying.

▶**You plan to keep the car for a long time.** You'll have no monthly payments after your car is paid off, but it will still have resale value. By contrast, you're left with nothing when a lease is up. "Are you then prepared to go into another lease with another down payment and potentially higher monthly payments if you don't put a lot down?" asks Melinda Zabritski, senior director of the financial solutions team at Experian Automotive.

▶**Your needs may change in a year or two.** "It's hard to get out of a lease before its term is up," says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of the Auto Test Center. Buying makes more sense if you think your needs may change–if, say, you expect to need a larger car or you may have to drive more miles than a lease may allow.

WHY IT'S SMART TO LEASE AN EV

According to the data analytics company Experian, 30.7 percent of EV drivers chose a lease in 2023, up from just 9.8 percent in 2022. It's easy to see why. Lessees can qualify for a federal tax credit of up to $7,500 without meeting restrictive requirements on where an EV or PHEV was made, how much it cost, or the lessee's income—all of which apply to purchases. Some automakers also discount leases on EVs and PHEVs to help sell vehicles that meet emissions rules.

Leasing an EV makes sense for other reasons, too, says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing.

"Prices and rebates on EVs have been fluctuating quite widely, making resale values impossible to predict," he says. For example, both Ford and Tesla have recently cut the prices of some of their EVs by thousands of dollars. "But if you lease an EV that depreciates significantly over the next few years, what it's worth at the end of the lease isn't your problem."

In addition, EV technology is advancing so rapidly that today's EVs may end up obsolete in a decade. Battery ranges are growing, charging standards and speeds are changing, and purchase prices are dropping, Fisher says. "If you bought an EV a couple of years ago, it might not even be capable of the fastest kind of fast charging," he says, "whereas the newer vehicles have larger batteries, faster charging, and may cost less."

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: HONDA

ILLUSTRATION BY SODAVEKT

SURPRISE! THESE CARS MAY BE BETTER TO LEASE.

If you've got your heart set on a fun-to-drive vehicle even though it scores below average in CR's reliability ratings, leasing may be the way to go, says Steven Elek, program leader for automotive data analytics at CR. "While it still may be a hassle to bring an unreliable vehicle to the dealer for repairs, at least it's under warranty while you're driving it," he says. "Then it's somebody else's headache when you turn it in at the end of a lease."

The much-loved vehicles below have high road-test and owner satisfaction scores but lower-than-average reliability. It would be better to lease one rather than buy—but only if you can find a good deal that also makes financial sense.

ALFA ROMEO TONALE

56 OVERALL SCORE

71	PREDICTED RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
ROAD TEST		

Super Stylish
This quick Italian plug-in hybrid is fuel-efficient but might not be that reliable.

LAND ROVER RANGE ROVER SPORT

61 OVERALL SCORE

81	PREDICTED RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
ROAD TEST		

Posh and Refined
You'll enjoy the buttery-smooth ride, but BMW, Lexus, and Porsche SUVs have fewer issues.

GENESIS GV70

63 OVERALL SCORE

81	PREDICTED RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
ROAD TEST		

Fun to Drive
This SUV handles like a sporty sedan but has more problems than some competitors.

MERCEDES-BENZ GLC

51 OVERALL SCORE

78	PREDICTED RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
ROAD TEST		

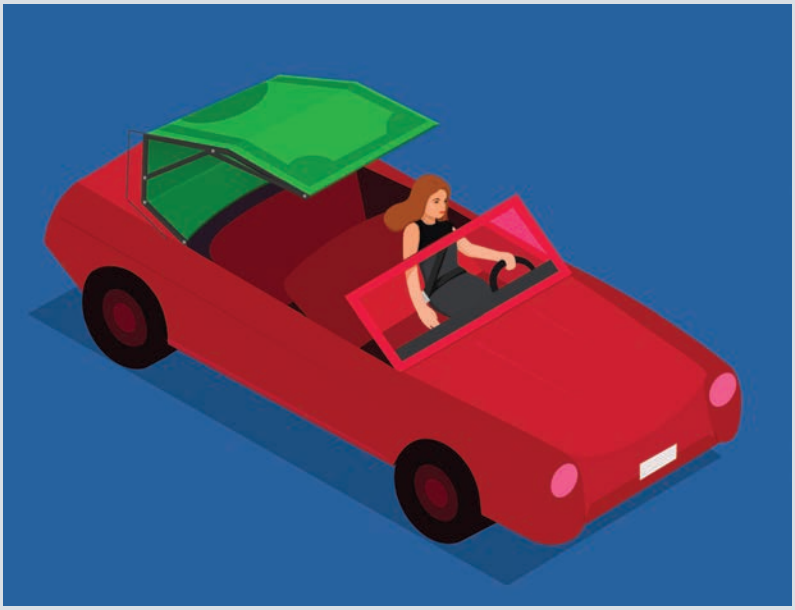
Luxurious Inside
The GLC packs tech and comfort into a right-sized package, but owners report reliability issues.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (4)

WORSE — BETTER

How to Save When Renting a Car

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON



RENTAL CAR PRICES have gone down nearly 20 percent from their peak in 2021, according to NerdWallet, but you may still be overpaying. Pricey insurance coverage (sometimes more than $30 a day) is almost always pushed by rental companies. Most of us probably don't need it, though: The Insurance Information Institute says personal auto policies usually include liability, collision, and comprehensive coverage on rental cars in the U.S. Many credit card companies also offer collision protection for vehicle rentals paid for with their card. But before you decline coverage, confirm with your auto insurance provider or credit card issuer that your rental car is covered. In addition, some cards won't cover rentals in Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, and a few other foreign countries. If you value peace of mind over money, however, paying for the rental car company's damage coverage means you won't have to file a claim with your auto insurer, pay a deductible, and risk a premium increase. Here are some other things to consider when renting.

CHEAPER CARS CAN COST YOU

Cars with the lowest rates often come with strings attached. Many rental car companies and third-party sites like Priceline offer big savings in exchange for paying in advance and/or choosing a "mystery car." We recently found we could save nearly $300 on the cost of a weeklong rental at Hertz in Los Angeles by choosing the mystery car option. But these deals might not include free cancellation, so if your plans change, you could lose your payment. You might also end up getting an electric vehicle, which means you'll need to find a place—and the time—to charge it. Third-party vendors such as AAA, Costco, and Priceline may offer the lowest rates, but if you need to extend your rental or make any other changes to your booking, you'll probably have to do it through their website. That could be more fraught than dealing directly with the rental car company.

BE PREPARED WHEN RENTING AN EV

EVs can be the least expensive rental car type, which can make them a tempting choice (and you may get one anyway if that's what's available). But before you opt for electric, remember that charging takes a lot longer than gassing up: A DC fast charger will typically add about 150 miles of range in 30 minutes; Level 2 chargers are more common but will add only 10 to 20 miles in the same time frame. Many hotels offer EV charging, but if yours doesn't, you can find charging stations on Google Maps or by using an app such as ChargeHub or PlugShare. "If you rent an EV, your best bet is probably a Tesla, which has the biggest, easiest-to-use network of fast chargers," says Alex Knizek, a CR EV expert. Don't expect that adding juice to the battery before drop-off will take just 5 minutes. To save time, pay the fee companies charge to do that for you ($35 at Hertz, for example).

USING ALTERNATIVE RENTAL CARS

Short-term rental companies like Zipcar allow you to rent by the hour (starting around $11) and have cars available throughout many cities. This might be a less expensive option if you need a car for only part of a day. To use Zipcar, you'll need to become a member, which costs $9 a month or $90 a year, plus a $25 application fee. (AARP members receive $20 off the annual fee.) Beware the laundry list of extra charges you can rack up, for everything from returning the car late to leaving the tank low on gas.

Peer-to-peer car rental services, such as Turo, let you rent cars directly from car owners. You may find low prices on peer-to-peer rental platforms, but their biggest advantage is making it easy to rent a classic or exotic car. If you want the latest safety features, check the model year to avoid renting an older vehicle that may lack them.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

COMPACT PLUG-IN HYBRID SUVs

Ford Escape PHEV

Fuel-Efficient but No All-Wheel Drive

74 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 87

HIGHS Fuel economy, decent electric-only range, agile handling

LOWS Limited front-seat adjustments, no available AWD

POWERTRAIN 221-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder plug-in hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

RANGE 37 miles EV[E] + 405 miles gas

FUEL 37 mpg on regular

PRICE $40,500 base price
+ $1,495 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $43,725

THE ESCAPE plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) is a pleasant-driving and efficient small SUV. But it isn't available with all-wheel drive, unlike most competitors.

PHEVs have a gas-powered engine for long trips but can run on electric power—for an EPA-estimated 37 miles in the Escape's case—for commuting or around-town errands. The relatively large battery pack can be charged overnight in about 10 hours with a standard household outlet or in about 5 hours on 240 volts.

Once the Escape runs through its electric range, it reverts to regular hybrid operation, where it managed an excellent 37 mpg. We came away impressed with the way the electronic continuously variable transmission (eCVT) mimics the upshifts of a conventional automatic.

The Escape PHEV is over 700 pounds heftier than the regular hybrid model, which contributes to a more comfortable ride. Although it feels softer and heavier through corners than the non-PHEV Escapes, it's still among the more agile small SUVs.

As with other Escapes, the front seats are short on adjustability and leg support. The rear seat has a lot of space, but the seatback's flat shape inhibits comfort.

Almost all controls have been moved to the infotainment touchscreen, which makes the climate system, in particular, more difficult to use than before.

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW ELECTRIC SUVs

Kia EV9

Quick, Comfortable, and Quirky

78 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 88

HIGHS Quick acceleration, short stopping distances, roomy interior, relatively speedy public charging

LOWS Short on handling agility, controls require some familiarity

POWERTRAIN 379-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 280 miles[E]

PRICE $54,900-$73,900 base price
+ $1,495 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $65,620

AS THE FIRST three-row midsized electric SUV from a mainstream brand, the EV9 sets a high bar. It's roomy, comfortable, and deceptively speedy, plus it has a robust driving range. We came away less impressed with its slightly ponderous handling and some unconventional controls.

We tested the Wind AWD version with the long-range battery, which has an EPA-estimated 280-mile driving range. With 379 hp from its dual electric motors, acceleration is effortless and almost silent. Its 5.3-second 0-to-60-mph time is nearly 2 seconds quicker than Kia's gas-only Telluride SUV.

A 210-kilowatt maximum acceptance rate makes for competitive charging times at public DC fast chargers, but it will still take a good 14 hours to charge the EV9 from empty at home using 240 volts.

Handling isn't a high point for the EV9, due in part to its weight and imprecise steering. (At 5,715 pounds, it's more than 1,400 pounds heavier than the Telluride.) In spite of its heft, it stopped admirably short in our panic-brake tests.

The cabin is roomy, including adult-friendly third-row seating. The front seats provide good comfort and form a nice pocket to help hold you in place. Many of our drivers (and passengers) raved about the EV9's cushy, mesh-covered front head restraints.

Some controls are difficult to use, including the twist-action gear selector that's mounted on the steering column or worse, the on/off button on the lever that's even more concealed.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

[E]EPA-estimated range.

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW LUXURY SUVs

Lexus TX350 and TX500h

Spacious Luxury Haulers

77 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 79

HIGHS Lots of interior space, nicely finished cabin, comfortable ride

LOWS Noisy engine, occasional rough shifts, some unintuitive controls

POWERTRAIN 275-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic; all-wheel drive

FUEL 21 mpg on premium

PRICE $53,700-$61,200 base price + $1,350 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $64,575

87 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 92

HIGHS Acceleration, roomy cabin, comfortable ride, high-quality interior materials

LOWS Some unintuitive controls

POWERTRAIN 366-hp, 2.4-liter turbo hybrid engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 24 mpg on premium

PRICE $68,000-$76,700 base price + $1,350 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $72,815

THE ALL-NEW TX three-row midsized SUV shares many of its mechanicals with the new Toyota Grand Highlander, although the Lexus is more luxurious. We tested both the TX350 and TX500h F Sport hybrid, and the hybrid outscored the regular version by quite a large margin.

A 275-hp, 2.4-liter turbo four-cylinder delivers strong midrange torque in the TX350. But the engine sounds gritty and unappealing, and the eight-speed automatic delivers some rough shifts. The TX500h's turbo-four with electric drive supplies lots of power at nearly any rpm. It's almost 2 seconds quicker from 0 to 60 mph and manages a better 24 mpg overall.

We found the TX500h, which comes standard in the more taut F Sport trim, to be relatively agile through turns for such a large vehicle. The TX350 feels more out of place when the road turns twisty, exhibiting distinct body roll.

The TX350's wide front seats are comfortable and likely to suit a range of body types. The TX500h's seats have pronounced side bolsters that hug you but could be too narrow for some. Second-row passengers are treated to tons of room, and there's more space in the third row than in most midsized models. Although there's enough headroom in the wayback for average-sized adults, the seat is low to the floor and has hardly any underleg support.

The infotainment touchscreen is easy to use, but the gear selector moves in a confusing path. The electronic interior door buttons respond slowly and are difficult to find for new passengers.

SUBCOMPACT SUVs

Hyundai Kona

An Updated, Roomy Little Runabout

62 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 72

HIGHS Easy to get in and out of, short braking distances, user-friendly controls

LOWS Loud and buzzy engine, tepid acceleration with the standard engine

POWERTRAIN 147-hp, 2.0-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 26 mpg on regular

PRICE $24,250-$33,300 base price + $1,375 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $31,440

THE KONA has been redesigned as a slightly upscale subcompact SUV. We found it to be an improvement in most ways over the old model, which suffered from a stiff ride and a cramped cabin. The new Kona comes with all the important active safety features except for highway-speed AEB, which is optional.

The base four-cylinder engine and CVT are a mostly fine-performing pair. We like that the Kona doesn't suffer from any delays taking off from a stop, but there isn't much oomph left in reserve. A more powerful 1.6-liter turbo four-cylinder is available.

It's easy enough to take the Kona through corners, thanks to its small size. The steering has a slightly rubbery feel to it, which diminishes the driver's connection to the road, but the vehicle performed well in our handling tests. The suspension is firm yet controlled, rarely allowing truly harsh hits into the cabin.

The nicely shaped front seats do a good job of holding you in place through corners, but they're too firm for most drivers. The plastic door armrests also get uncomfortable quickly. The rear seat is spacious for a subcompact SUV, with ample headroom, lots of foot space, and good underleg support.

The infotainment touchscreen is easy to use, and we appreciate the physical climate-control buttons. The optional twist-type electronic gear selector takes some getting used to, but with practice it can be operated without looking at it.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **SUV Update** The Lexus TXs and Kia EV9 are formidable SUVs. The Ford Escape PHEV can drive 37 miles on electric, while the Hyundai Kona has had a good update.

MAKE + MODEL	OVERALL SCORE	PRICE	SURVEY RESULTS		ROAD-TEST RESULTS											ADAS
		As tested	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
SUBCOMPACT SUVs																
✓ **Subaru Crosstrek** 2.0L	87	$29,685	⏫	🔼	82	29	490	🔼 / 🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	🔼	10.1	128	O
✓ **Honda HR-V** 2.0L	74	$28,790	⏫	🔽	70	27	380	➖ / 🔼	⏫	➖	➖	➖	➖	11.1	130	O
✓ **Toyota Corolla Cross** 2.0L	69	$28,329	🔼	🔽	68	28	370	➖ / ➖	🔼	➖	➖	➖	➖	9.3	128	O
✓ **Kia Seltos** 2.0L	68	$24,820	➖	⏬	73	28	365	➖ / 🔼	⏫	🔽	🔽	➖	🔼	9.0	128	O
✓ **Mazda CX-30** 2.5L	67	$28,645	🔼	🔽	65	27	340	🔼 / ➖	➖	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	8.7	133	S
Chevrolet Trailblazer 1.3T	63	$28,360	➖	🔽	68	27	360	➖ / 🔼	🔼	➖	➖	➖	➖	9.5	133	O
Hyundai Kona 2.0L	62	$31,440	➖	➖	72	26	330	🔼 / ➖	⏫	➖	➖	🔽	🔼	9.8	127	S
COMPACT PHEV SUVs																
✓ **Toyota RAV4 Prime** 2.5H+E	89	$45,923	⏫	🔼	88	34	42[E] +500	🔼 / 🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	6.3	142	S
✓ **Kia Sportage PHEV** 1.6T+E	87	$41,320	🔼	➖	92	31	34[E] +345	🔼 / ⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	7.4	130	O
✓ **Hyundai Tucson PHEV** 1.6T+E	82	$39,440	➖	➖	94	31	33[E] +345	🔼 / ⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	7.4	130	S
✓ **Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV** 2.4H+E	82	$47,225	⏫	➖	79	25	38[E] +365	🔼 / 🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	7.2	135	S
✓ **Ford Escape PHEV (FWD)** 2.5H+E	74	$43,725	➖	🔼	87	37	37[E] +405	➖ / 🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	8.2	133	S
LUXURY THREE-ROW SUVs																
✓ **Lexus TX500h** 2.4T+H	87	$72,815	🔼	🔼	92	24	415	⏫ / ⏫	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	6.3	135	S
✓ **BMW X7** 3.0T	78	$84,095	➖	🔼	90	22	475	⏫ / ⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	6.5	136	S
✓ **Lexus TX350** 2.4T	77	$64,575	🔼	🔼	79	21	375	⏫ / ⏫	🔽	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	8.1	131	S
✓ **Audi Q7** 3.0T	76	$71,010	➖	🔽	87	20	440	⏫ / ⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	7.0	133	S
✓ **Cadillac XT6** 3.6L	72	$62,515	➖	➖	76	18	385	🔼 / 🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	7.1	134	S
✓ **Acura MDX** 3.5L	70	$58,400	➖	➖	74	20	365	⏫ / ⏫	⏬	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	7.4	139	S
✓ **Infiniti QX60** 3.5L	70	$59,835	➖	🔽	81	21	385	🔼 / 🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	6.7	138	S
Volvo XC90 2.0T	66	$65,395	🔽	➖	80	20	380	⏫ / ⏫	🔽	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	7.7	126	S
ELECTRIC THREE-ROW SUVs																
✓ **Kia EV9**	78	$65,620	➖	🔼	88	NA	280[E]	🔼 / ⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	5.3	126	S
Rivian R1S	52	$79,250	🔽	⏫	72	NA	316[E]	🔼 / 🔼	⏬	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	3.5	132	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

THREE-ROW SUVs

CADILLAC XT6
$48,795-$60,295 **72**

HYUNDAI PALISADE
$36,650-$53,850 **83**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THE CADILLAC XT6 is a luxury SUV with generous interior space, a quiet cabin, good visibility, and responsive handling. But despite those perks, it can't quite match the more premium-feeling models from other high-end brands. For thousands less, the Hyundai Palisade also has upscale styling and a particularly comfortable cabin. Plus, it offers higher predicted reliability, a longer warranty (plus three years of free service), and better fuel economy.

MIDSIZED GAS GRILLS

WEBER GENESIS SMART GRILL EPX-335 35810001
$1,400 **79**

EVEN EMBERS GAS8560AS
$565 **76**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THE TOP-RATED Weber offers solid performance across the board. Its predicted reliability is excellent, and it comes with a host of extra features, including a side burner, a pizza insert, and a probe that wirelessly connects to your smartphone so that you can check the temperature of whatever you're cooking—without opening the lid. But you'll pay (a lot) extra for those conveniences. The Even Embers doesn't have fancy features—just a side burner and a bottle opener—and it's slightly less reliable. It does offer great performance, though, for about a third of the price of the Weber.

SHEETS

L.L.BEAN PIMA COTTON PERCALE
$170 QUEEN-SIZE **76**

THE BETTER DEAL

KIRKLAND SIGNATURE (COSTCO) PIMA COTTON
$80 QUEEN-SIZE **76**

THE LOWDOWN

THESE SHEET SETS are tied at the top of our ratings, and they're very evenly matched. Both are soft, strong, and wrinkle-resistant, and both fit 10-inch and 14-inch mattresses well. The pricier L.L.Bean sheets shrank a little less during our wash tests and have a label to indicate the head or foot of a fitted sheet—a handy aid that the Kirkland sheets lack.

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